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OLD AVALANCHE, THE GREAT ANNIHILATOR: Or, Wild Edna, the Girl Brigand.

BY EDWARD L. WHEELER,
AUTHOR OF "DEADWOOD DICK," "THE DOUBLE DAGGERS," ETC., &c.



WILD EDNA'S RIDERS.

Old Avalanche,

The GREAT ANNIHILATOR;

OR,

Wild Edna, the Girl Brigand.

BY EDWARD L. WHEELER,
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CHAPTER I.

BURIED IN THE DEATH G'LCH.

Four men had pitched their camp on the crater of a northern peak, thousands of feet above the level of the sea, thousands of feet above the level of the great plains of Nebraska, at the close of what had been a sultry August day.

The peak table-land was far the most elevated of any of its neighbors of the surrounding chain, and its top was as smooth and even as a floor, while in dimensions it was about three hundred feet in circumference.

On the northern, eastern and southern boundaries, stretched away mile after mile, one continuous wilderness of rugged and tree-fringed mountains, whose tops were capped with snow, and down between which dashed angry torrents, silvery cascades and slides of rock and frozen ice, into dark, yawning seams and chasms.

On the western side of this aerial plateau, yawned an immense, fathomless abyss, whose aspect was weird, silent, awful in the extreme. It appeared to have been formed by a sudden sundering of the surrounding mountains by some mighty convulsion of nature, and to have been left a black, bottomless abyss into which no eye could penetrate from above, into which no man could descend.

While two of the four men were preparing the evening meal, the remaining two stood at the brink of the precipice, regarding the scene with awe and silence.

The space in front of them was about fifty feet in width by one hundred in length—a naturally formed shaft extending far down into the bowels of the earth. Directly across on the western side, and considerably below the plateau, a goodly-sized cascade leaped over into the abyss, and as no sound could be distinguished of its striking bottom, the watchers drew the conclusion that the rift reached down at least to a level with the plains.

"Tis a frightful gulch!" ejaculated the elder of the two, a man of some eight and thirty years—"at whose bottom nothing of life has probably ever existed."

"Yes. In all our explorations, Sir Henry, we have never confronted such a fissure of the earth. By my soul, I'd give a deal to be able to descend to the bottom, if there is a bottom, and see what sort of a place this chasm really is."

"True, Milburn; but that could never be. It would require miles of rope to lower one down, and though we have a good thousand feet, 'twould not be enough."

"Let us be content, then, with the laurels of discovering the highest peak of this wonderful chain of mountains, if not the highest in America. On the morrow I will hew the name of this expedition in the floor of this high plateau, to tell future generations whose feet first trod upon these rocks."

So saying Sir Henry turned back toward the camp-fire, while Milburn remained a short time longer at the brink of the dizzy abyss, staring thoughtfully down into the black depths.

"Curse him!" he muttered, gnawing at his mustache, savagely, "how I hate him. I joined him in his confounded wanderings, and still I have not

accomplished the object I had in view, when I did so. Two long years we have traveled together, and never yet have I found the suitable opportunity, to—to—but bah! I am weak. The time will come, and that not many days distant, too, when Sir Henry and I will part company, and forever!"

He rejoined the party at the fire, and seated himself to partake of the dried venison and roasted bear-meat which the other two men had prepared. They were odd-looking specimens of the frontier, and plainly not persons of culture or education like Sir Henry and Milburn.

The younger and more noticeable of the twain, evidently a Canadian, was about nineteen years of age. He was swarthy in complexion yet not unprepossessing, and possessed a form marked in its muscular development.

The second man was short, grizzly and athletic, with not a pound of superfluous flesh on his limbs, nor a sign of ears upon his head, they having been shaven off close to the skull. His eyes were gray and piercing, his mouth large and indicative of humor, his hair tow-colored, and his beard brown and stubby.

He was attired in buckskin, as are the generality of Northern mountain-men, and armed with silver-mounted revolvers, knife, tomahawk and Spencer rifle.

"Darned bad hoel," he nodded to Sir Henry, motioning toward the abyss, and at the same time taking a huge bite of bear-meat. "Nevyar see'd ther beet on't, only once afore, in my life."

"When was that?" asked Sir Henry, gnawing away at his bone in true hunter style.

"Wal," said the guide, meditatively, "et ar' several years, since. Et was ther time I war up hyar wi' ernuther 'spedition!"

"What!" exclaimed the baronet, starting up, excitedly;—"you do not mean to tell me you were ever here, before, sir?"

"Reckon I do. I've feasted on b'ar-steak on this plataw, mor'n this one't, yer honner."

"By heavens! you have astonished me. I had supposed we were the first human beings who ever trod upon these rocks. Explain yourself."

"Thar hain't much ter 'splain, sar, 'ca'se ef ye'll go over yander thar, ter the sou', an' sharply screwchinize ther rocks, ye'll see who's bin hyar ahead on ye, 'thout my 'splainin'."

Sir Henry sprung to his feet at once, as did Milburn, and seizing a flaming cone from the fire, for the pall of night had settled over the land, they hurried to the southern edge of the plateau, and bent over to scan the rocky floor. They had not long to look, for they soon came upon a spot where, by the skillful use of a hatchet, former discoverers had hewn out their names:

"JOHN C. FREMONT." "KIT CARSON."

"Here, Lanch," calle'l Sir Henry, "come here. How did you know of these names?"

Alva Lanch, the guide, left his place by the fire, and sauntered up.

"How did I know on 'em?" he repeated, grimly. "Wal, I happened ter be hyar when they war cut. I war erlong wi' ther Fremont experdishun w'en they soar'd over thes d'reeshun; an' conserkently, w'en them handles war indented thar."

"But you never told me?"

"Why shed I? Ye asked me no questions nor I didn't tell ye no whoppers. Ye guv me seventy gold dollars ter help ye git onter ther top o' ther loftiest peak in thes range o' mountings; I tuk ye up, an' hyar ye ar', arter fifteen days' hard trampin'. Ye'd've dun better ter ask me afore we sot out ef ennybody war ever bin hyar ahead on ye. Then I shed 'a' tole ye yes. As it war, ye nevyar said boo, so nuther did I say boo. Et ar' so, ain't et, boss?"

"Yes; you speak truly," replied Sir Henry, in a discouraged tone. "It was all my fault. I never addressed you on the subject, because I did not deem it necessary, so positive was I that no explorer

had as yet done this range. 'John C. Fremont,' and 'Kit Carson.' Humph! America owes a deal to those two men. As Christopher Columbus was first in discovering the American continent, so Fremont and Carson have been foremost, in the present generation, in exploring the most lofty peaks, the wildest canyons, and the smallest and most obscure lakes. How many were there of your expedition, when you gained the summit, Lanch?"

"Three—Fremont, Carson, and myself."

"And were you three all of the exploring party?"

"On course not!" replied the guide. "There were seven of the pack, but only us three klim up hyar, ther other four remainin' at ther place whar we camped last night."

"How long ago was it?"

"Two years, three months an' seven days, ter-night."

"How long did you stay here?"

"Only over nite uv the day we arriv'. 'Twas un-comfort'ble cold up hyar, them times, so we soon dug out for warmer climates. Fremont named yon hoel ther Death Gulch, beawse his spanyel dorg tumbled off inter et, an' Carson called this ther Flat Butte; then we buckled on our armor, an' marched, marched away."

"I wish I had known of this some time ago," said Sir Henry, gloomily, turning back toward the fire, whither Lanch and Milburn followed him.

Soon the evening pipes were brought forth, and while the quartette puffed away thereat, the guide related some interesting details of the former exploring expedition under the great Fremont.

Sir Henry listened eagerly, but Milburn and the young Canadian were not so much interested, and presently withdrew to the edge of the abyss to have a little conversation by themselves.

Alva Lanch watched them secretly, as he told his story, under cover of his shaggy eyebrows, but said nothing bearing upon them.

Finally the time arrived when it was desirable that all hands should turn in, as an early start was proposed on the following morning; therefore Sir Henry called in his companions, and bade them prepare for sleep.

"Thar'll hev ter be sum' more cones lugged up from ther second peak, below," said Lanch, glancing at the fire, which was fast expiring, "fer it begins ter feel er little chilly up hyar. I say, yo Can'dy Thistle, s'posin' ye go an' try yer 'nack at shinnin' rocks. I toted ther fust sackful up; et ar' no more'n fa'r ye she'd do vice-versy on ther seekont."

He addressed the Canadian, who was about to roll himself up in his blanket.

"Bah!" he growled, showing his pearly white teeth in a forced smile; "you'll excuse me. I prefer daylight for my clambering over the mountains. Let the fire go out, if it wants to. I guess we won't freeze."

"Then you won't go?" demanded Lanch.

"No; I am quite comfortable," replied the youth, wrapping himself in his blanket, and giving vent to another smile. "If you are so fond of starlight rambles, Mister Lanch, perhaps it would be well to go, yourself."

"Here! here! Raleigh!" exclaimed Sir Henry, angrily, "let's have no more words of bandy. Will you go for the fuel?"

"No," replied he, doggedly—"not to-night!"

"Then I shall at once discharge you from my service."

"Will you, though?" hissed the fellow savagely, his dark visage growing still darker. "Very well; just as you please, sir."

And roiling over he made pretense of seeking repose.

"Let 'im hev his own way," said Lanch, taking up a large bag, which lay among the other effects at the party had brought along. "I'll slide down fer ther cones in a jiffy. Ter-morrer I'll walup ther young whelp fer his impecience."

He at once descended from the plateau by clam-

bering down from ledge to ledge, and was soon lost from view in the pall of inky blackness that enveloped the mountain-top.

"You can lie down, Sir Henry, if you like," said Milburn, as he lit a fresh pipe of tobacco, "for I know you must be fatigued, from our long ascent, to-day, and need rest. As for me, I'll smoke awhile longer, yet, and await Alva's return."

The baronet acquiesced in this proposition, and leaving Milburn half-reclining in the light of the dying embers puffing away at his imported meer-schaum, Sir Henry rolled himself in his blanket, and quickly was in sound and refreshing slumber.

Milburn, however, became momentarily more restless, until he trembled with suppressed excitement, as he glanced toward Sir Henry.

Half an hour wore away, and the loud respirations of the baronet proclaimed that he was sound asleep, whereupon Milburn rose stealthily to his feet, and stole forward. Simultaneously the young Canadian did likewise.

"Are you ready?" he demanded, in a whisper.

"Ay!" replied the other, "all ready. Now, then, heave ahead; you take charge of his mouth and see that a screech don't escape him, while I bind his hands and feet."

"Agreed!" whispered back the Canadian; and then the two men threw their combined weights upon the slumbering explorer, and in a twinkling had him securely bound and gagged.

It is needless to say that Sir Henry was both astounded and enraged at the rude and unceremonious treatment but could only lay and glare at the two villains in utter helplessness.

"Ha! ha!" laughed Milburn, with a grim chuckle; "you are surprised, eh?"

A nod of the head signified assent.

"I thought so," resumed the villain; "but that is nothing strange, as we are liable to surprises. Do you recognize me, Sir Henry, as any one you remember of ever having seen?"

Another head-shake, in the negative.

"Don't? Well, probably not. I must admit my disguise is one hard to penetrate. This hair, this beard and these garments are all foreign to your recollection. Yet they hide the man, Sir Henry, whose life has been devoted, since childhood, to the sole attainment of an object—an object which must be patent in forever removing you from my path. Lis'en!" Then he bent low and whispered a few words in the prisoner's ear, at which the baronet uttered a loud, agonized groan and grew pale and agitated.

"It is true," resumed Milburn, with a triumphant leer, "and I have followed the course of your movements ever since you left New York, for the purpose of removing you. I do not wish to kill you. Murder on the hands of an English nobleman is not at all desirable, and therefore I simply wish to put you aside from my path. You admire America; I love England, my native soil. Then, is it not well that I should live in England, while you remain here in quiet, peace and plenty?"

"Yes!—doubtless yes. I have found a cage in which I can confine you, and run no risk of ever being troubled by you again. Raleigh, bring your coil of rope, and fasten one end about this baronet. Work lively, now, for we must be well away from here, ere that ferret-eyed guide returns. Once we are safely in St. Joe, and our explorer lies at the bottom of Death Gulch, a thousand gold dollars shall be yours, my boy!"

The Canadian obeyed with alacrity, and from among the "traps" of the expedition produced a large coil of stout half-inch rope, an end of which he arranged into a noose and shirred about the baronet's waist.

This done, Milburn proceeded to deliberately rifle the prisoner's person of everything of value, save his arms and ammunition, which he did not touch. He then whispered for several moments in Sir Henry's ear, after which he rose to his feet.

Old Avalanche.

"You may pitch all that luggage over into the abyss, first, Raleigh," he said, setting an example by pitching over blankets, etc., "for in our flight, you see, we shall not be able to carry aught save our weapons, and I do not mean that Alva Lanch shall derive any benefit from these tools and traps!"

Consequently everything save the two villains' rifles and ammunition was hauled over into the canyon—axes, picks, blankets, pots, kettles, Sir Henry's and Lanch's rifles, surveying instruments, and so forth, in turn, until the plateau was swept of all except the two men and their prisoner.

He, too, was then dragged forward to the brink of the frightful gulf, and the lowering began.

In vain did Sir Henry endeavor to shriek out a plea for help, or burst the cruel bonds that bound him.

All to no avail.

Swiftly the two men on the table-land above allowed the rope to slip through their fingers, and let the helpless victim of a flendish plot descend into the bowels of the mountains.

Presently they had allowed all but about a yard of the death-cord to slip away.

"Shall we let him go?" asked Raleigh in a hollow, scared tone.

"Yes!" replied Milburn, white and ghastly—"let her slide. He's probably to the bottom before this; and if he's not, he ain't far from it. Let go!"

The next instant they released the rope from their grasp; then, turning like the two guilty wretches they were, they seized their rifles, left the plateau, and hurriedly skurried off down into the black mountainous depths.

CHAPTER II.

THE PLEASURE PARTY—FIGHTING ODDS.

Down across the great savannas of the Northwest, booming along in front of a giant volume of wind, which spread its arms out afar, rolled a thick cloud of dust, in whose depths galloped a party of six persons, all mounted on spirited, thoroughbred animals.

Two of the six were ladies, attired in rich but unattractive garments; but the fact that they wore diamonds of marvelous size and luster, evidenced the supposition that they were persons of wealth and high social rank.

The gentlemen were tastefully accoutered, save it be with one exception—the guide of the party—and bore the undeniable impress of refinement.

One, who was evidently chief in command, was a tall, athletic young fellow, with clearly-cut features, dark-blue eyes, and hair of a chestnut color, while in form he was a model of grace and symmetry.

The second of the four males was a slender, dark-visaged gentleman, verging on forty years, who was evidently a Spaniard, or of some foreign descent.

The third was of a far different type, and his hair was sprinkled freely with lines of gray. He was of immense girth, and sat his horse much more clumsily than his companions; and in his general appearance reminded one of the stern old lords or dukes of ancient times.

The ladies evidently were mother and daughter. The elder was a woman who had seen not a little trouble, for her brow was furrowed deeply and her hair of a silvery white. Still, she showed many traces of former beauty, and was yet really prepossessing, despite the weary yearning expression that ever haunted her sad face.

The daughter was a repetition of what the mother had been in her youthful days—a bright, vivacious little body, just nearing the portals of a glorious womanhood, with laughing eyes, soft blonde hair, that blew unconstrained to the prairie breeze, and a complexion that matched well with both hair and eyes.

Such were the party, exclusive of the guide. He

was a stalwart backwoodsman of an uncertain age, and as rough and uncouth as are the majority of those ever-moving spirits, the Princes of the Trail. His name was Dan Coggswell, and he had been engaged at Dakota City to lend his assistance to the pleasure-party, for such the cavalcade was, during their stay in the West.

Now, we see them spurring madly down from the northwest, across a mammoth savanna or plain, and hugging close to the giant column or cloud of dust, which the brisk northern breeze wafts steadily in front of them.

Their horses are flecked with foam, evidencing the fact that a long and rapid ride has taken place; and still on, on, over the green-carpeted savanna they dash; on at a speed only second to the breeze that rolls the cloud of dust in advance.

It is mid-afternoon, and the sun that hangs like a golden ball in the azure blue sky, lights up all objects beneath its rays with a mellow distinctness.

Across to the west looms up the gray uninviting range of mountains that are described as being the rendezvous of numerous bands of red-skins and outlaws; to the east, coiling its course through barren prairies, runs *Au Jaques* or Dakota river, in the even tenor of its existence, until it debouches, miles below, into the mad Missouri; to the south and sou'east stretches one of those monotonous savannas or grazing plains of Dakota, famous as the home of the deer and the buffalo, the paradise of hunters and trappers; while to the north and nor'west—ha! here the interest deepens, and the cause of the undue haste on the part of the pleasure-seekers, becomes apparent.

Sweeping down in their rear, and only a couple of miles distant, are a body of horsemen, who, as one glances over them, look like a small army, so strong are they in numbers.

And, too, their horses are fresh and fleet, and they are gaining slowly but surely on the party in advance. That they are Indians is evidenced by their wild riding, their semi-nude dress, and the occasional war-whoops that float faintly forward on the breeze. Sioux is their tribe (for it is a rare occurrence to meet a war-party of any other tribe in Northern Dakota), and that they are determined to overtake the fugitives is only too plainly shown by the manner with which they urge on their ponies.

Dan Coggswell was in the rear of his party, hurrying them along as well as he could, and at the same time acting as a rear guard in case the foe should get near enough to pour in a fire with their rifles, for all were seen, through the guide's field-glass, to be well armed.

On, on, on, the pursued whites dashed, desperately determined to escape if such a thing were possible, but as a half-hour flew by, and the horses began to lag and the Indians to gain, Coggswell shook his head doubtfully.

"We can't hold out at this rate, much longer," he said, as he galloped ahead and joined the young commander; "for them Soos ain't goin' to give us the slip, ye can bet yer eyes; and our hosses are loosin' all their breath, too. I opine we mought as well come to a halt, an' try an' persuade 'em not to cum forinst us, as the Irishman sez, with our rifles. What's your views on't, Sir Harry?"

"What! stop here and let the devils come up and murder us at their leisure? Never! We must do something, guide. Do you hear? we must do something to get my mother and sister out of danger. Is there no other direction we can take to escape these hellhounds?"

"Yas," replied Coggswell, reflectively, "thar is two on 'em."

"Then, in Heaven's name, why not take them?"

"Wal, I reckon 'twouldn't be o' no sorter use, Sir Harry. One's tow'rd Dakota river. Go that way, an' the varmints 'll head us off afore we git thar, or at furthest will drive us into the stream w'ot are too deep and wide to swim."

"The other, then?"

"The t'other? Wal, that's tow'rds them mountings, off yander. They're chock fuller o' ther red heethan an' white outlaws, than the Black Hills themselves."

"But can we not find temporary shelter there, in some canyon or gulch, where we can fight these rascals, and in due time steal off?"

"Hardly probable. Soos ain't on ther give-up, nowadays. When they scent a prize they're the lads as bes got as much hang-on-a-tiveness as ther next one. Howsomever, if ye say the word, we'll shy off fur them hills, an' run our chances. We kin bleech in ther mountings as well as any other place."

"How far are they distant? Can we reach them before our horses give out?"

"Reckon so, if we ride full spurt."

"Very well, then lead ahead, and we will follow."

The course of the fleeing cavalcade was instantly changed, sharply to the right, and the spurs used with more vehemence.

Already the savages had gained one of the two intervening miles, and threatened every moment to gain a position in the chase within rifle-shot.

On—on sped the fugitives, like the hurricane wind, Dan Coggswell keeping slightly in the lead, and using his field-glass now and then to define the route which promised to take them nearest to a place of retreat.

The ladies, although much fatigued, were eagerly urging on their animals, and putting their implicit trust in the skill and sagacity of Dan. Had it not been for the impending danger, they would have enjoyed the wild ride immensely, for they were true Englishwomen, and having chased many a fox down the moorlands of their native isle, they had become masters in the saddle, as well as mistresses in the social circle and household. But a hundred grim and bloodthirsty savages, bringing up the rear, with the desire to rob or murder them, took from the situation all its romance.

On—on, over the green savanna they swept, and in hot pursuit came the red slayers.

"I think I know about the spot where a canyon opens into them hills," said the guide, peering straight ahead, "or at least, heerd Old Avalanche, who traps, hunts an' annihilates Injuns up hyarabouts, say that thar war a place o' ther kind d'rect east from Flat Butte peak. That's off yonder!"

He pointed straight ahead, and off afar through the hazy distance loomed up the frowning awful pile of rock whose summit was hundreds of feet higher than the surrounding peaks.

"Flat Butte, did you say?" exclaimed the elderly lady, excitedly. "Flat Butte?"

"Yes, ma'am, that's what I said."

"Oh! Sir Fleming," she gasped, turning to the gentleman of the great girth, "is that the place? Is that the spot where my dear husband met his Ceath?"

Her voice was full of sorrow and anguish; her cheeks had grown a shade paler, and her hands were clasped beseechingly.

"I think not, Hetty," replied he, rather nervously, as he took the glass. "If you peak is christened Flat Butte, it is not the one from which Sir Henry flung himself, fifteen years ago. That one is, if I remember aright, further south and east."

"Beg yer parding, sir, but I rec'ons how you're mistook. This butte are the only one's you'll find up nor' hyar, in this particular region, 'cept it be Pumykin Butte in the Hills," said old Dan.

"No, I am not mistaken," was the haughty reply. "However, let's drop the subject, and turn our eyes around us, lest we be surprised."

A glance went to prove that the pursuers had come within arrow range; and were preparing for a final spurt.

"On!" cried Coggswell, sternly, and the jaded steeds were lashed into further speed. "They must not git in a wipe o' them arrers on us, or some o' us'll be troubled wi' chronick reumatism!"

On, desperately on they dashed, hotly chased by the painted man-hunters, whose yells were now increased both in volume and hideousness. On, and they were nearing the mountain range which rose so frowningly out of the almost level savanna, when Coggswell suddenly shouted:

"Look! there is the mouth of the canyon of which I speak'd. If we kin git inter it, we kin fight the p'izen varmints at our leisure."

He pointed to a black angular opening in the mighty bluffs of mountain, through which gurgled a little streamlet.

A cheer rose from the lips of Sir Harry and was answered by a perfect pandemonium of yells from the savages.

They lashed their ponies furiously, and sent cloud after cloud of arrows and volley after volley of bullets in pursuit of their intended victims.

But all to no avail.

In five moments Dan Coggswell led his party between the towering walls of the canyon, and ordering the ladies to ride on into the depths, he commanded the men to dismount and prepare to defend themselves.

On came the Sioux in a rush, with the idea that they could break into the canyon, but they were mistaken, there.

The horses had been wheeled broadside across the entrance, and as the savage enemy came pouring into view, four well-directed bullets from the little party's repeating rifles, unhorsed as many reds.

Again the repeaters spoke, and eight instead of four warriors went sprawling to the ground. At first the Indians were confused; and half terrified, beat a hasty retreat, out of rifle range, to hold a short consultation. Soon they came fiercely on in another rush, only to be met with a perfect stream of fire from the wonderful repeating rifles, that swept away half a dozen braves from their ranks. Again they withdrew a short distance, and leaving a post of two-score to watch the fugitives, the main body separated and swerved to either side of the canyon. Their purpose at once became evident. They were going to scale the mountains and enter the gulch from the rear.

CHAPTER III.

TWO REMARKABLE VISITORS.

"THEY are going to assail us from some other point," said Sir Fleming, as he with the others watched the division of the savages. "Is there another end to this canyon, guide, through which we can make our escape?"

"Wal, now, that's a question that only time can solve. P'raps thar's an outlet sumwhar more or less than five thousand miles from here, an' ag'in, p'raps thar ain't. These canyons ar' as full o' crooks, curlyquews an' curious freaks o' natur' as a mule's hind fut. If thar's an end to this purtick'lar one, ye can bet yer shiners that it ar' fur from this—cl'ar thru on t'other side o' ther mountings. That's true gospul!"

"And do you think the red-skins who just rode away contemplate climbing the mountains and getting into this canyon in our rear?" asked Sir Harry.

"I hain't ther least doubt o' it!"

"Then, in God's name, what ought we to do—what must we do?"

"That's w'at I'm cogitat'in' on, but ain't made up my mind, yet. Give me room an' time to think."

Then he relapsed into silence, and while the others were watching the movements of the remainder of the Indians. Dan racked his brain for some possible plan by which he could extricate the party from the impending danger.

The guard left outside the entrance were now seen to dismount and picket out their ponies, while active preparations were being made for camping on the spot. This convinced the guide that the enemy were not going to relinquish their prize, while there might be a chance of capturing it. They were going to surround and take the gorge on all sides.

"We will camp where we are," he said, at last, "an' do the best we can. 'Twon't do to ventur' i'nter ther depths o' ther mountings too far, fer we mought like's not git caged thar. Sir Bruce, yo'd better trot off up the canyon, an' recall Lady Milburn an' Lady Maude, an' we'll camp right hyar fer ther present."

Sir Bruce obeyed with alacrity, and in half an hour returned with the ladies, and a camp was pitched on the spot.

This consisted of a couple of portable tents which had been brought along for the use of the females and the gentlemen; and soon a fire was built, and Coggswell prepared some dried venison for the whole party.

By this time it was sunset, and the shadows of night settled dark and somber over the earth.

Sir Harry volunteered to stand guard the fore part of the night, and Dan the latter; so the night passed away and another day dawned bright and rosy, without sight or sound of hostile movement from the enemy.

After breakfast Dan put the camp in charge of Sir Harry, and shouldering his rifle and mounting his horse he set off up the canyon to make observations, as he said.

The canyon soon proved itself to be similar to many others of its kind in this wild region. In places it was not over a hundred feet wide, and walled in by such mammoth towers of rock that all was densely black at the bottom, which was grassy and watered by an infant stream.

Then further on it would widen somewhat and become lighter, though the sides were still high and perpendicular. For miles it stretched away between giant peaks, whose crests were capped with snow the year around, and wound its way like a forsaken freak of nature through the silent northern wilderness of rock and wood. Far away, still in the dim distance, loomed up the Flat Butte like a frowning monster, as it reared its summit haughtily above those of its neighbors, and seemed to discountenance human approach.

Coggswell had never explored the range, but he had heard much concerning it, and did not venture very far into its depths for fear he might arouse another gang of red-skins. So, after assuring himself that the canyon extended at least as far as the Flat Butte, he turned his horse's head toward camp.

As he retraced the route over which he had come, he minutely scanned the walls on either side of him, to see if there was any chance for the enemy to penetrate the gorge.

No; there was no opening in the great mass of rock, that would admit of passage. If they got in at all, it would be by lowering each other with lassoes from the pinnacles above, whither they would have to climb.

Satisfied that such was the true state of affairs, and that days if not weeks must elapse ere such an entrance could be effected, Coggswell rode back to the camp. Here he found matters as he had left them, and that there were no signs of immediate trouble from the twenty reds who had camped outside the mouth of the canyon.

Sir Harry Milburn was lounging on guard just out of rifle range, and Sir Fleming and Sir Bruce were in their tent cleaning their weapons.

"What did you make out?" asked Sir Harry as the guide joined him.

"Oh, nuthin' much. I don't 'spect any trouble right off, tho' it's well enuff to be on ther lookout fer it," was the reply. "Any stir among the Injines?"

"No, not to speak of. They seem to be lounging and laying around, at their own ease, as you see them."

"Humph! An' all the w'ile they're plannin' sum devilment, ye can bet yer flip. Howsumever, we're powerless to purvent it. All we kin do ar' ter lay low, an' wait further dewelopments."

The day passed without incident, and night with her somber mantle overshadowed the mountains, canyon, and plain.

Sir Bruce was detailed to keep the first vigil, and Dan the last.

Accordingly, they changed off at midnight, and the guide went on duty. There was no moon, and though a few pale stars twinkled up afar in heaven's blue vault, the shadow of the towering bluffs cast over the camp a pall of gloom.

No fire was kept burning, for the guide well knew that the enemy would take advantage of the light to pick off an occasional white with their long-range rifles. They, however, kept a little blaze near by their camp, and when it would die down their pickets always took pains to replenish it, so that their camp was flooded with light.

Coggswell could not understand this at first, although he was alive to the fact that there was a motive in it. He was not aware that full half the savages were concealed beyond that fire eagerly watching the enemy's camp, with the idea that some of the whites would, out of curiosity, creep near to spy upon them, and thereby offer a target for half a score of rifles.

But in this the fierce wretches were foiled. Dan was too wise to "nose around" in their vicinity. Still he did not allow his watchfulness to decrease, but, on the contrary, kept his eyes and ears even more alert than on the foregoing night. He felt that something was soon to occur, but what it was he was unable to imagine.

The hours went slowly by, and as morning's dawn approached, the night grew blacker and stiller.

The guide had just returned from a trip around the camp, and was starting off toward the Sioux camp, when a suspicious sound arrested his attention.

It came from the direction of the entrance, and sounded like stealthy footsteps in the rustling grass.

Cocking his repeater, Dan peered straight ahead, his eyes sharply searching every object in the pass. At first he could make out nothing, but presently he beheld a visible moving and swaying of the tall vegetation, and looking, as he was, toward the bright-light of the enemy's camp-fire, he thought he could distinguish the bobbing of a head now and then above the surface of the grass.

Who was it? Were the savages trying to steal in, and effect a surprise?

It looked decidedly so, else why so stealthy an approach?

Watching warily for a moment longer, the guide brought his gun to his shoulder, and sung out:

"Halt! Who comes there?"

In an instant all was silence.

The rustling ceased, and the bobbing in the verdure was gone.

"Speak; who are you?" again demanded Coggswell, advancing—"friend or foe?"

"I reckin that ar' erbout the state o' affairs," replied a shrill, wheezy voice; and the next moment the figure of a man leaped nimbly from the depths of the grass, and came tumbling with *handsprings* into the guide's presence, closely followed by a small, sheepish-looking animal of the genus *C. ipra*—a real, live, and exceedingly ugly-looking goat. Dan Coggswell leaped back in consternation at the unceremonious *debut* of the pair; but, as the little old man ceased his eccentric revolutions and came squarely upon his feet, rifle in hand, beside the goat, the guide sprung forward with a glad cry.

"Old Avalanche, by all that's holy!" he exclaimed, catching the new-comer's hand and wringing it warmly.

"Yas, yas; ver correckt, b'yee—correckt as er full moon in fly-time. Et ar' Old Avalanche, the Injun Annihilator, who is a volcanner o' destructive ness, a hail-storm o' demolishen, an' er whirlwind o' terrificosity—a great an' awe-inspirin' avalanche

o' annihilation w'ot continerally sweeps down thr'u' these boreal lattytudes!"

"Good! I'm as glad to see ye, old man, as a coyote is to smell dead hoss, arter a severe winter. But, whar in ther name o' Israel Putnam, did ye cum frum?"

"Cum from? Whar'd I gush forth from, d'y wanter kno'? Ol! nowhar in purtikylar. I smelt the savory odor o' Injun down this way, so I got aboard o' a veritagable thunderstarm o' demolition, under the conductorashun o' O' Rory Borey Alice, an' war wassted over inter thes deesstrict fer ther purpuss o' annihilatin' a couple a-hundred Sooks. See ye've a regimint o' ther same acting as yer body-guard, out hayr."

"Oh yes. The divils have got us penned up hyar, an' thar's no tellin' how we're goin' to git out. What kind o' a beest d'ye call this feller?"

"That? Why, creeation hain't ye nevyer heerd tell o' thet anymile? Thet's my half—my best-half, and a j'int o' ther destructive Avalanche. That 'ar's a *he goat*, w'at navygaits under ther appleation o' Florence Night-in-a-gale. I'm the *he-goat-ee*, w'ot floats through the atmosphere under ther ognomen o' Old Avalanche, Injun Annihilator; an' *he's* my pard. Ye observe et allus takes *t'yo*, at ther most indefsynite calkylation, to make a bargain, an' sumtimes three. Wal, sich bein' ther status o' erfairs, I an' Florence ar' two, an' w'en ther third feller cum in wi' his say 'bout things in gineral, we two consolidate an' win the bargi'n by demolishen ther third party! We ar' one an' always wins when it comes to fight, or fodder, or fun."

"Haw! haw! haw!" laughed Dan, really happy, now that he had met one of his own type of men. "I see ye're's full o' sass as ever, old man. But, tell me, how did you git in here?"

"How did I git hayar? How did the mighty avalanche o' demolition git here? Why, b'yee, how does this great ackcheevemunt allus work its astoundin' miracles? How does the whirlygig o' destruction allus sweep down like a grasshopper brigade thru these Injun latitudes an longytoads? How, indeed? Echo ans'ers faintly haow? Wal, I'll explain to ye. I smelt Soo down hayrabouts, so I an' Florence Night-in-a gale jist stepped aboard o' a thunderstarm o' exterminashun, cornducted by the great O' Rory Borey Alice, an' were socked down at ther entrance o' this canyon in less time 'n et takes to say Zackariah Zebulon!"

By this time the shrill tones of the eccentric Avalanche had aroused the camp, and the whole of the party came tumbling out of their tents, to ascertain the cause of so much commotion.

It was still quite dark, and only the outlines of the two friends' forms were discernible to the noblemen.

"Hello, there, guide!" shouted Sir Harry as he approached, accompanied by Sir Bruce and Sir Fleming; "what's the go?"

"Oh! nothing much," was the reply. "Come up, I've got a recruit here!"

"A recruit, eh?" and the gentleman crowded eagerly around. "What! a mountaineer? Jove; this is luck!"

"Yes, sar," replied the old man, leaning on his rifle, and peering at the noblemen through the gloom, "a ginnuywine northern mountener, who floats through the atmosphere about five feet above terry firmer, under the pump-handle o' Old Avalanche, the Great Injin Annihilator—a volcanoneck erruption o' destruction, a hailstarm o' demolition, and a veritagable equinocksayell decockshun o' annihilation."

CHAPTER IV.

WILD EDNA DEMANDS TOLL.

This caused a general laugh, during which the corpulent Sir Fleming espied the old goat, faintly discernible in the darkness.

"Hello! What is this—a mountain dog?" he asked,

advancing with all an Englishman's love for the canine creation, and attempting to pat the animal on the head. "Nice doggy, nice doggy! There, pup, do not be frightened, because I will not harm you"—for Florence Night-in-a-gale had backed away, shaking his head dubiously. Seeing that he could not effect an acquaintance with the stubborn "dog," the nobleman turned to Old Avalanche.

"What breed is your dog, stranger?" he asked, condescendingly.

The Annihilator was about to answer when there was a rush, a savage "ba-a-a," and the neck and heels of Sir Fleming suddenly approached each other with astonishing quickness, and he went rolling end over end, to the further side of the camp.

Sir Fleming dolefully picked himself up, and glared about wildly.

"What was that?" he demanded, stamping his foot with rage; "what was that that struck me?"

The answer came quickly, for like a rocket the frolicsome goat, with a bound and a bleat, rammed his knotty head against the baronet's imposing paunch, again rolling him over and over like a ball.

"That's 'bout ther breed o' my dorg," snorted Old Avalanche, roaring with laughter, and prancing delightedly about; "that's ther pedigree o' Florence Night-in-a-gale. Kim hyar, Florence, ye onmannerly rapscallion. Don' ye kno' no better'n to buck one o' yer own color? My b'yee, ye shed allus remember that ye ar' only called upon tew butt *I, juns*—tew lend yer head-geer tew the heethan. Nevyar, nevyar let me catch ye buckin' one o' yer own color erg'in, or I'll wallop yer red!"

Sir Fleming arose with evident trepidation, and, clasping his hands over his abused paunch, made for his tent with groans and muttered curses.

Morning dawned clear and warm, and in the first rosy light, the imprisoned party was enabled to view for the first time a genuine northern mountain man—for such was Old Avalanche—from deerskin leggings and beaded moccasins, to his fringed skin hunting-shirt and bearskin cap.

He was of medium stature, with a muscularly developed form, and clean, wiry limbs, and looked to be a person of uncommon strength. Though well along in years, he was still supple and active as a man of forty. His skin was tanned to a dark brown, and his whole face and appearance was as grizzly as grizzly could be. His face was deeply scarred and seamed, his hair was long and tangled, and his eyes were wonderfully brilliant and piercing, considering his age. They seemed capable of reading one's innermost thoughts and secrets. In some affray he had lost *lo'k e'rs*, a disfiguration that would render him recognizable in any place or under any circumstances.

His arms were of improved pattern and finish, the rifle being a repeater, and the revolvers in his belt of the Colt make. A bowie and hatchet also hung at his hip, and this completed the outfit of the notable mountaineer and guide.

His reception by the Ladies Milburn was hearty, and Sir Harry and Sir Bruce were no less demonstrative in their joy at his coming. Dan had said much of the prowess, skill and ingenuity of the Annihilator, and now that he had condescended to drop in upon them, all felt that they could rely upon him to extricate them from their present difficulty and danger.

"I dunno about it," was the veteran's reply, when Sir Harry asked him if he felt himself equal to the task of guiding them into a place of safety. "These purteckler lattytudes—an' longytoads ain't ther most delightful kentries as ye ked wish fer. 'less ye're able ter 'preeshate ther failings an' virtues o' ther Injun creeashun. If a feller gits inter Injun embarrasments, it's mor'n prob'le be won't git out o' em, wi'out losin' his wig, 'less he happens to be a hallstarm o' demolition: like me, fer instance."

"But there certainly must be some way by which to escape from here. Does not this canyon have an opening at some other point?"

"Ye've got ther Avalanche thar, b'yee, fer sart'in, 'ca'se I don't eggsactly kno'. Ye see, I nevar 'splored it any fu'ther'n the Flat Butte, whose base ar' 'bout twenty miles from hayr. Thar mought be another eend to et, then ag'in thar moughtn't. These canyons ar' worse nor a dose o' pills fer phizzickin' a feller's ijees an' calkylashuns. Sum-times they'll run fer miles as purty an' natcheral-like as a volcaner o' destrukshion: then, ergain, ye'll p'r'aps foller one for a mile or two gude ernuff; when ye'll cum slap-dab up ag'in' a mounten o' rock."

"Indeed! How far westward does this range extend?"

"More or less'n a hundred miles. It's cl'ar twenty on 'em to ther fut o' ole Flat Butte, an' thet ar'n't a sareumstance ter w'ot's beyond."

"Humph! We are indeed in a trap, then. I almost despair of ever gettng back within the bounds of civilization."

"Ye mustn't guv up so easy."

"And why hope, pray?"

"Oh! fer numerous reason. I'll bet a cart-load o' b'ar-meat that I an' my j'int'll get you out o' this, afore long!"

"Your j'int?"

"Eggsactly—my j'int—my half-an'-half!"

"I fail to comprehend."

"Eh? Don't see thr'u' et? Wal, that's quare. Ye observe thet my goat thar, ar' a j'int o' the great thunderstorm o' boreal destruction, an' consekkently, he's a j'int o' ther famuss Avalanche, w'ich same ar' yer 'umble sarvint. He's my goat, is Florence Night-in-a-gale, an' I'm his goatee. He's a j'int, cogwheel an' ram-rod o' ther Annihilation; I'm the proprietor, ther orig'nator, an' ther hull machinnery o' ther ackcheevement. We two, consolidated, make up ther arful Norweegjan avalanche o' destruction, w'at sweeps off Injun varmin frum these lattytudes an' longytoads; ther volcaneck errupshun o' extermination; ther whirlygig o' demolishun an' hailstarm o' subversion an' annihilation!"

"Heaven!" gasped Sir Harry, "if you are all you claim to be, I should hate to have you wage war against me!"

"Correckt—correckt as full moon in fly-time. Grasshoppers an' mounten dew! why, when both j'ints o' ther Avalanche git inter operation, an' thar's plenty Injuns erbout to annihilate, we're a parfect thunderbolterous decockshun o' death an' extinkshun. Sir, jes's true's I'm a Norweegjan avalanche, I an' my half-an'-half, Florence Night-in-a-gale, thar, kin lick more Injun-meet than any alliance this side o' Mississip' rivyer on a bet, an' by ther sun. Wanter bet?"

"No, I think not. I should first prefer to see you operate on these savages out there at the mouth of the canyon."

"An' ye shell be grattysied soon, sure's thar's virtue an' modesty in a he-mule's hind fut. I think I'll take a skirmish over thar, now, I do."

And, looking to his weapons the eccentric old fellow threw himself on the ground and wiggled off toward the entrance, closely and silently followed by his remarkable goat.

The grass in the mouth of the canyon was nearly waist high, in consequence of the ground at this spot being somewhat marshy, so that the movements of the Avalanche were not observed by the watchful savages outside.

The two were absent a greater share of the day, and those in camp were beginning to grow fearful that their stand-by had either deserted them or been captured, when he quietly reappeared among them, accompanied by Florence.

A glance at his grim, anxious face told them that something had happened, which boded them no good.

"What is it, sir?" asked Lady Milburn as she approached him, leaning on the arm of her beautiful daughter. "I trust we are in no immediate danger of being massacred? Coggswell said, only yester-

day, that he apprehended no trouble for several days yet."

"Wal, ma'am," was the Annihilator's answer, as he seated himself on a convenient boulder, "that's all to one's way o' thinkin'. As I've obsarved sev'ral times behind, it ginneraley takes two or more parsons to make a bargain. Now, then, I an' my jin't, hyar, Florence Night-in-a-gale, hev been comparin' notes, to-day, an' we've arriv' at ther universal conklusion thet we're goin' to expeerience thunder'n' hot times, purty soon, near's we kin jedge!"

"What's that?" asked Sir Harry, coming up. "Have you made any alarming discoveries, scout?"

"Alarmin'? Wal, that's jes' as ye luke at the thing. You mought call 'em alarmin', while I called 'em simply 'hot.' Howsumdever, I've satisfied my ijees, thet ef we wait 'til ye escape thru that hoel yander, wi' ther assurity that ye git safe away wi'out gittin' yer ha'r dressed by Injin barbers, ye'll be's gray's ole Job's hen-turkey. Ther pererarey ar' jes' swarin' wi' red-skins, an' they're preparin' to drive us back inter ther mountains. See hayr, folkses, thar's one thing'w'at puzzils me. Ev'ry consarned Injun out thar kerries ther calkylashun 'bout him, thet when they get you-'uns they'll git swads on swads o' money an' dimunds an' jewels, an' sich like. Thar's white devils 'mong 'em w'at's seen ye up at Dakota City—Idaho Bill an' Red Bill, for instance, who ar' two o' the wu'st cut-throats this side o' perdition, an' they're a-urgin' on the red niggurs by tellin' 'em w'at lots o' spondulix ye've got. Now, is this so, or is et sum o' them renegades' cussed lyin'?"

Sir Harry and Lady Milburn exchanged glances; then the former replied:

"Yes, it is partly true. We have money and jewels enough about our persons to come to a million dollars if sold in fair markets."

The old man shrugged his shoulders.

"Ye're dumbblasted fools fer bringin' 'em out inter this kentry, then," he growled. "Thet, however, ain't none o' my bizness. Ye've got yerselves inter a muss, an' ye must prepare to bear up no matter w'ot 'tarnal diffikilties ye meet. Ef we all git out o' these mountens 'thout we git ha'r dressed, I've lost my scientifekk rec'onin'. Nevyertheless, we hev got to try. Ther great Avalanche is wi' ye, an' ef he ken't see ye out o' thes embarrassment, no other destructive human ken. But ernuff o' jaw-waggin'; let's adjourn ter bizness. Saddle an' mount yer hosses, al! hands, an' ride fer dear life up ther canyon. Do not stop 'til ter-morrer daybreak ef ye ken keep on. Thet'll fetch ye 'bout ter ther fut o' Flattened Butte. Stop hayr an' wait 'til I j'ine ye!"

"But what do you intend to do?"

"I must steal a hoss frum them Injuns fust. Nevyer feer fur me. I'll cum out top o' the pile."

"Shall we take the tents along?" asked Sir Harry.

"No. Leave 'em whar they ar'. They may keep ther reds from 'speckin' ye've sloped an' keep 'em from attackin' right off."

So the tents were left standing, the horses carefull saddled, packed and mounted, and then, when all was in readiness, the cavalcade dashed off up the gorge, under the guidance of Coggswell, leaving Old Avalanche and Florence sole tenants of the deserted camp.

For hours they rode rapidly on. The bottom of the canyon was comparatively level, consequently no serious impediment was offered to their progress.

Night fell dark and dense over the grand old mountains, for the sky was overcast with menacing black clouds; and still the fugitives urged their steeds through the gloom of the great canyon which stretched away, as deep, silent and lifeless as before, and doubly more blank and impenetrable.

All night they rode on, and as the first tints of day-dawn were seen to flush against the mountain crests, they came to a halt at the base of that mighty pile of rock and wild grandeur, the Flat Butte.

"Thar, ma'am," said old Dan, doffing his hat respectfully to Lady Milburn, as he nodded upward.

toward the far-distant peak—"that's ther Flat Butte, up yander, an' ther only pile o' mounting o' that name in all Dakota; in fact, thar ain't ernuther flat butte short o' ther Black Hills or ther Rockies."

"Oh, Sir Fleming!" exclaimed the lady; "then you must be mistaken. This must be the mountain I am in search of. Oh! sir, do not tell me I am wrong. I must, I will know the truth, and have a search made for my poor, lost Henry's bones. Ay, I will, sir, if we have to search the country over!"

"Nonsense, Hetty; you are getting crazy over this subject. I have told you once that this is *not* the Flat Butte I mean. Is not that enough?"

"No! it is not enough!" cried Sir Harry, sternly. "I now fully believe this to be the peak."

"Take care, young man, how you speak to me, your better. You forget."

"No, I forget nothing; nor do I fear you. If my mother wishes search made, it *shall* be made! Let that be understood."

"It shall *not*, without my consent. Who commands this party, pray?"

"I do—my share of it!" was the retort of the decided young nobleman.

"And what do you claim as *your* part?" sneered Sir Fleming.

"My mother and sister, sir, and our guide, I trust, Sir Tyrant. As to Sir Bruce Lesquirk, I do not know whether I can count on him as ally or not."

Sir Bruce smiled a purely French smile, and nodded his head negatively.

"Sir Harry forgets that I owe my support and title to Sir Fleming," he said, in a soft, oily voice. "I should therefore consider *his* wishes above all others."

"Very well," bowed the haughty young peer, coolly; "just as you like. Your room is of more account than your society."

Sir Fleming laughed, evilly.

"I think by the rights of a husband and guardian, I also have the ladies under my control!" he chuckled.

Sir Harry bit his lip savagely, but did not answer. Coggswell, however, spoke for him:

"Enough o' this wranglin', now," he growled, "fer thar's other biz on hand. We're goin' to have visitors."

He pointed on up the canyon to where a large party of horsemen had come in sight through the gloom, and were galloping down toward them. They were all attired in the garb of mountain-men, were armed with polished rifles, revolvers and knives, and wore crape vails as masks over the upper portion of their faces.

But, most strange of all, they were headed by a woman—a young and beautiful creature, with skin of creamy whiteness, pure and classic features, eyes like stars in their brightness, and hair of nut-brown color, which hung to her waist in a mass of wild confusion. Her form was the perfection of a sylph, and was clad in a rich Spanish-Mexican riding-habit, while a belt around her taper waist was bristling with weapons of the best pattern and finish, as was the rifle that was slung across her saddle bows.

She was mounted upon a superior black charger, adorned with gay and elegant trappings, and sat her saddle with the ease and grace of a finished equerrienne. As they noted all these facts, both Dan Coggswell and Sir Henry uttered exclamations of wonder and admiration.

"Beautiful!" said the latter to his pretty sister, who was riding by his side. "She is *just* my ideal of what woman can be."

"You think her pretty?"

"Ay!—What grace! what strength, what command! She is magnificent! Hey, guide, do you know her?"

"Reckon so; at least I've heerd tell on her, but didn't expect to meet her hyar, no more'n I would 've Job's hen-rooster."

"But, who is it?—who are they?"

"Ther femayel is Wild Edna, the Girl Bandit, an'

them others ar' her backers—a wild an' fearless a set o' devils as ever chawed le'd!"

"What! a girl-bandit? that beauteous girl a bandit? Impossible, sir!"

"No, et ain't nuthin' o' the kind. Jes' wait a bit an' ye'll see fer yerself."

At the guide's command all the men cocked and raised their rifles, and as the new-comers came within speaking distance, old Dan sung out:

"Halt or we fire!"

Wild Edna addressed her followers then, and they drew up in form across the canyon, while she, affixing a white 'kerchief to the end of her rifle, rode fearlessly forward.

"What do you want?" demanded Sir Fleming, as she rode within a few rods and drew rein. "What and who are you?"

A smile irradiated the maiden's face as she eyed every one among the party, and then replied:

"Your ponderous lordship, I have the honor of introducing myself as Wild Edna, the Girl Bandit. Those I left behind me are my men."

"Indeed! A most remarkable vocation for a young lady of your personal beauty, I should say. I was not aware that America was infested with banditti!"

"Then you were not well informed, sir. May I make bold to inquire what brought you into Devil's Canyon?"

"We were driven hither by the Indians," replied Sir Harry, eying the vision of beauty before him with undisguised admiration.

"By the Indians, eh? Well, that is no uncommon occurrence, for we often see parties of hunters, trappers and explorers caged in this same trap. I suppose it is your desire to pass on through the canyon and get out of these mountains, is it not?"

"Most assuredly, if there is possibility of such an escape."

"You are then, doubtless, prepared to pay the toll without delay, so that you can earlier take your departure?"

"The toll?"

"The toll. Every person who passes the Flat Butte by the gateway of the Devil's Canyon is required to pay a toll, the same being any amount I may see fit to exact. On consideration of its payment in gold or greenbacks, my followers see that you are guarded safely on through the mountains and started *en route* for the nearest post of civilization."

"By the gods!" growled Sir Fleming, in a rage, "you have the most sublime cheek it has ever been my lot to behold. Why, child, do you imagine we will tolerate any such interruption as you probably will seek to place in our path? I'll shoot you for your impudence."

"No, you will do nothing so rash," was Wild Edna's cool answer. "One finger laid upon me in anger, or a hand upraised against me, would seal your fate. My men are all sworn to obey and protect me, and avenge me should I fall. God pity the man who incurs their enmity! His death would be terrible."

Sir Fleming cowered under the fire that shone from her wondrous eyes.

"What toll do you require," asked Sir Harry, "before you pass us on?"

"Well, that depends. Let me see—there are six of you, and I see that all of you save the guide sport diamonds—a fact that tells me your wealth is great. Of what nationality are you?"

"All, except two, are English. Sir Bruce here, is a French Canadian, and the guide a Yank!"

"Very well. The toll, then, shall be *six thousand dollars*—one thousand a head!"

CHAPTER V.

OLD AVALANCHE ON THE RAMPAGE.

AFTER the cavalcade was out of sight up the ravine or canyon, Old Avalanche began to fix things

around in camp, in such a manner as would lead the savages to suppose all the party were still there. He found several blankets in the tents, and wrapping these about suitable broken limbs that were strewn about, he manufactured some quite creditable dummies, which were put in position near the mouth of the gorge. After arranging everything quite to his satisfaction, he stationed the goat near the entrance to watch, while he threw himself upon the ground and was soon off in a sound and refreshing slumber, from which he did not waken until the shadows of night had enveloped the earth.

Then, after calling in Florence by a shrill whistle, he ate a few bits of dried bear-meat, after which he was ready for the war-path.

Out on the prairie he could see the glow of many camp-fires, and from these he guessed that the reds were not to attack the camp that night, or, if at all, not until a late hour.

The reflection of the fires against the clouded sky enabled the shrewd old scout to ascertain their number, for each fire cast a distinct glow from the others, where they were not too contiguous, which was not the case, now.

There were eleven reflections, and from their scattered positions, the Annihilator concluded that the enemy were spread out over a considerable portion of the neighboring savanna.

After carefully examining his weapons, and bidding Florence to lie down and watch the camp, he slung his rifle behind his back, threw himself on all-fours, and crept out of the mouth of the canyon. Once outside, he came to a momentary halt, and cautiously gazed about. All around him lay spread out a panorama of wildness, life and grandeur. Down across the almost limitless plain, were the lights of twinkling camp-fires, which there lit up the starless night like open day; the moving of hundreds of dusky figures, the neighing of horses and the guttural shouts of men, told that there was the Indian camp.

Here were countless dozens cooking their evening meals; there were other groups engaged at their long council-pipes. Here were braves rubbing down their horses by the light of the flaming torch, and there a small army of dogs, yelping and snarling over a cast-off bone.

Everywhere were more or less bustle and activity, and, viewed in the bright light of great, roaring camp-fires, it was a scene of exciting interest and novelty.

After several moments' scrutiny, Old Avalanche became satisfied on two points. One was that there was a large increase in numbers since his previous visit, and the other was that there were not less than a dozen sentinels concealed in the grass, very close to where he was crouching. He had seen more than one suspicious swaying of the verdure around and in front of him, which, as there was not the faintest breeze stirring could only be accounted for by the presence of a skulking red-skin.

To get beyond their lines without attracting attention he well knew was impossible; but beyond he was determined to go, if he had to wade through a whole regiment of them.

So, tightening his belt, and drawing his keen-edged bowie, he crawled carefully on, making scarcely any sound or stir among the high grass. His course lay along the base of the mountain, for he knew that if he could escape the sentinel in this direction, he would be enabled to approach the corral of the Indians' horses with more security of not stumbling against a cordon of enemies.

On he crawled, with less noise than a creeping serpent, every nerve strung and ready for work, and his eyes and ears on the alert for hostile sight or sound. Presently he suddenly paused.

Right in front of him he heard a rustle, which betokened the presence of a savage. Had the red-skin discovered him? For fully half a minute the scout paused in doubt; but, as all was again silence, he

thrust the blade of his knife between his teeth, and began to wriggle slowly backward.

This retreat, however, was of but short duration, for he soon came to another halt.

There were enemies *coming up in his rear!*

These were not creeping up, though; but advancing in an upright position, and were four in number. Their course lay straight toward where the scout was concealed, and in a few moments they would be upon him.

"One on 'em's Idaho Bill," he muttered, as the loud, brawling voice of one of the new-comers floated out on the air. "Darn his black hide, et won't do fer him ter git his peepers on ther Averlanche—ther boreal breeze o' destructiveness, or thar'll be miracles to pay. I opine et would be healthy to slope."

In retreating from where he supposed the sentinel to be lying, it had been the scout's plan to gather himself up and, by a succession of handsprings, land plumb on top of his enemy; but a glance, now, warned him that this would be impossible on account of the approach of Idaho Bill and his companions; so he once more crawled ahead toward the concealed red-skin. He experienced no difficulty in obtaining his former position, where he paused and grasped his knife in a firm hand.

Then he listened. There was no noise ahead. The next instant, the Annihilator gathered himself up and made a fierce lunge ahead through the grass, to where he believed the savage was lying.

But, great was his mistake.

No savage was there, and his long knife was plunged to the hilt in the earth. Ere he could withdraw it, he heard a chuckling grunt, and wheeled about just in time to avoid the blow from a hurtling tomahawk, hurled from the hands of a giant savage, not six yards away.

In another instant the two had sprung to each other's embrace, and were locked in a desperate war-hug. Over and over they rolled through the rustling grass, writhing, twisting and squirming, but emitting no sound save what was caused by their movements, each determined to crush the other in his terrible hug.

The Annihilator was knifeless, but still had his revolvers, but clasped in that terrible hug he could not draw either weapon. The red-skin still possessed his knife, but was likewise powerless to use it.

So the struggle depended alone upon craft and strength.

Of the latter the savage had the advantage, although Old Avalanche was possessed of even more than an average share, and a few moments convinced the scout that he had met more than his equal.

The red-skin was gradually warming up to his work, and bent all his energies toward retaining his position on the upper side. And, though the scout fought desperately against this, he was doomed to defeat, for, ere he was scarce aware of the fact, the savage had wrenched himself from his hold, turned him under, and pinioned him securely to the ground as in the grip of a vise.

He then eyed his prize with a demoniac grin on his bedaubed features, as if undecided what to do—whether to bind him with cords and bear him into camp, or to brain him on the spot.

So astonished was Old Avalanche that for a few moments he was rendered speechless. Never before had he been so easily conquered by one of the hated red-skin race. The grinning captor seemed to divine his thoughts for he said:

"Ugh! white dog much heap big brave; kill many Sioux. Running Ant lope too much stout for 'im, dough. He take great brave to Rain-in-the-Face, an' dey burn him at stake!"

"Ye will, hey? Ye'll take ther enormous Nor-weegjan avalanche ter yer camp, will ye, an' roast him in ther Soo fryin' skil'et, will ye? Ye'll trot ther boreal thunderarm o' demolishen 'bout jest as ye please, will ye?"

"Ugh! yes. Rain-in-the-Face be heap glad to see the No-Ear brave."

"He will, hey? He'll slop right over wi' joy w'en he sees ther volcanic snow-slide o' annihilation, will he? Wal, jes' telegraf tew him not tew slobber, jes' yit! Tell him ter adjern his feelin's o' sunnynis 'til he's got yar 'umble sarvent fu'st."

"Ugh!" grinned theemon, "let the No-Ear listen. The white chief is coming, and he will help Antelope bind his prisoner."

Old Avalanche's heart now sunk within him, for he heard the tramp of many feet and the loud murmur of approaching voices that told him Idaho Bill and his companions were coming up. Once more he struggled fiercely to free himself, but all in vain. Running Antelope had him where he could hold him firmly.

"Ugh!" he chuckled—"can't no git away." But he spoke not the truth, then.

Scarcely had the words left his lips when there came upon his hearing the shrill bleat of a goat, and the next instant the form of Florence Nightingale shot meteor-like through the air, and the Antelope became the recipient of a tremendous bunt in the back that shut him up like a jack-knife, and wholly broke his hold upon the scout.

Old Avalanche leaped to his feet with alacrity and darted away into the darkness, for the redskin's howls instantly brought a swarm of his comrades to the spot; and it was not safe to linger thereabouts longer. Florence meekly followed, and in a few moments the two were out of the reach of immediate danger.

Here the old man halted and took in his bearings, after which he started off in the direction of the corral, which lay some two miles distant to the northeast.

In order to reach it he was obliged to make a circuit of the entire camp, that was now awakened and on the alert; for, by the magic system of Indian telegraphy, the news had been transmitted to every camp-fire of the scout's escape. But to a man as thoroughly experienced as the Annihilator, this was merely play, and in the course of half an hour he and his faithful "j'int" were close in the vicinity of the corral. This was about fifty rods from any camp-fire, and the animals were guarded by four mounted braves, each well armed.

The red-skin nearest to where Old Avalanche and Florence were crouching, was a stalwart young warrior, and was mounted upon a clean-limbed, fiery Texan horse of a jetty black color.

Both horse and rider were motionless, for the latter's attention was now directed toward the camp, which was all excitement on account of the scout's probable presence in the vicinity.

As he gazed at the handsome warrior and the magnificent horse, a desperate resolve entered the Annihilator's mind.

He would obtain possession of that animal, or something more than a common "scrimmage" would prove a failure. With it, and he on its back, it would be no trick at all to dash back into the Devil's Canyon, from whence he would follow and join the advancing party.

Bidding Florence to lie down, the scout crawled stealthily forward through the grass, and after some time reached a position directly behind the guard's steed, and so close that he could touch its rump with his hand. Then he rose softly to his feet. The brave was still unmindful of the presence of an enemy.

His attention was cast upon the movements of those in camp.

For several moments Old Avalanche softly stroked the hairy haunches of the horse to quiet him, for, on the scout's rising he had appeared restive. Then placing his two hands firmly on the animal's hips, he made an agile spring and landed squarely upon his back behind the sentinel, around whom he flung his arms in a steel-like embrace.

The horse reared, and snorted with terror, and then dashed away wildly, bearing straight down into the swarming camp.

CHAPTER VI.

A SPECTER ON THE SUMMIT.

ALL, even Coggswell the guide, put up their hands in astonishment at the amount demanded by the Girl Bandit. They had imagined her toll would not exceed a few dollars, consequently the sum named seemed almost an incredible fee.

"Zounds!" cried Sir Fleming; "do you imagine we are made of money? Your impudence is astounding! Had I a suitable whip I would chastise you."

A merry peal of laughter from Wild Edna showed how this little speech affected her. Evidently she was as fearless as she was beautiful.

"Who are you, lady?" asked Sir Harry, respectfully. "We seldom see females of your surpassing loveliness the master of such a dangerous and romantic situation."

"True, Sir Inquisitiveness; but who I am, and what are my antecedents, concerns you not, tha' I see. My business here, is to collect the toll for passing through this canyon, and not to divulge my secrets and history to utter strangers."

Her voice was now cold and haughty.

Sir Harry flushed a trifle, and bit his lip to keep back a hot reply. Her retort had damped his ardor more than he would have dared to own.

Sharp-eyed little Lady Maude had noticed the effect, however, and gave him a sisterly little nudge.

"Faint heart never won fair lady, you know," she whispered, and then burst into a gay, ringing laugh that caused more rushes of color to go darting across her brother's handsome face.

"Bah!" he growled, with a frown. Then, turning half-savagely upon the Girl Bandit, he continued:

"Well, what are you waiting for?"

"For six thousand dollars," was the cool, unconfused answer.

"Indeed! You can go, then, for you will get no such a sum out of me!"

"You forget, my lord. I only ask one sixth of the toll from you—the remainder from your companions."

"But they will not give it, no more will I. So you can go."

"May I presume to inquire, then, what you will do? You can go no further in this direction without paying the toll."

"Then forget we are armed, and capable of fighting our way through!" ventured Sir Bruce, sneeringly.

"Scarcely, through such odds as my band. I command full sixty brave men. What could you hope to do against them?"

"Not much, it's true. Nevertheless, I, for one, will not submit to being swindled thus out of a thousand dollars. I refuse to pay you a single dollar!"

"Likewise, I!" growled Sir Fleming.

"And I!" from Sir Harry.

"And I!" grinned old Dan. "This chicken's bin bankrupt these five years."

"Very well. If this is your final decision, gentlemen, I suppose it includes your ladies as well as yourselves."

"It does."

"Then I will bid you adieu. Make no attempt to go further up the canyon, or you will be riddled with bullets. These are stern laws, but they are such as bind the banditti of Devil's Canyon together. You have refused to pay the toll. To-morrow, next day, and the next I will visit you and request its payment. If you refuse each time, you will not be dunne again!"

"Indeed. Then, I suppose you will adopt harsher measures?"

"Yes. The laws of the brotherhood will then grant you ten days to escape from the canyon, by the route you came, if you can fight through a legion of red-skins. On the morn of the eleventh day the flood gates of Lake Tico, a sheet of water in the peaks of this range and connecting with Devil's Canyon, will be removed and its water will sweep all that blocks its path, in this place, away!"

"By Heaven!" gasped Sir Harry, "I believe you are an incarnate flendess!"

"Nay, my young sir, you are wrong. I have no more power to avert this catastrophe than I have to move these mountains. It is true I am the captain of yon band of men, but when parties refuse to pay the toll, my power ceases, and *another* than I, sees that the terrible laws of the order are enforced. I am bound and a helpless captive while the work of destruction goes on!"

"Horrible!" cried both Lady Milburn and her daughter in a breath.

"Outrageous!" growled Sir Fleming.

"True; but I must not tarry. You still refuse to pay the toll?"

"You will not lower the figure?"

"I will not—cannot—dare not!"

"That is all, then. We refuse."

Without a word the beautiful commander turned her horse's head, touched him with her jeweled whip, and galloped back to the band. After a short consultation they soon all dashed away up the canyon and quickly disappeared among its numerous curves.

After they were out of sight Sir Harry turned to Coggswell.

"Well, it is done with now, I suppose. What are your views on the subject, old man?"

Dan shook his head dubiously.

"Ye've got me," he replied, slowly. "I don't know no more what ter do nor does a new born babe!"

"Then there is no way we can get out of here except by retreating or going ahead, eh?"

"None's I knows on. I opine we'd better camp down hyar, 'cordin' ter Avalanche's orders, an' wait fer him tew come up."

"Yes, I believe you are right. We are securely penned up, for sure, and may as well make the best of our situation. With red devils at our back and white flends in our front, we cannot hope to escape, that I see!"

Dan nodded, and then dismounted, while the others followed his example. The canyon was carpeted with an abundance of grass at this point, and after the animals were picketed out to graze, the guide set about arranging the camp. As but one hour's sunlight penetrated the bottom, it was quite chilly even in mid-day, so a roaring fire was kindled out of cones and brushwood.

Out of a few remaining blankets a tent was improvised for the use of the ladies, and soon all were quite comfortable in their novel retreat.

The day passed slowly aw'y.

While the others were lounging about camp, Dan shouldered his rifle and scoured the sides of the canyon in hopes of finding some break that would permit them to escape from the impeding danger; but vain the search; the giant walls towered frowningly aloft, unbroken, and uninviting. No break in their face would admit of the passage of a human being.

During his tramp, however, the sharp-eyed guide had succeeded in bringing down a young bear, from the pinnacles above, and this he bore gladly back to camp as a handsome trophy.

Choice steaks from young bruin were roasted over the fire, and made a very palatable dish to the hungry fugitives.

Their camp was directly at the base and in the shadow of the giant Flat Butte. Any person standing on its summit could drop a pebble into camp, and kill a man as easily as to fling a stone. So argued Sir Fleming, and he requested that the camp be removed further up the gorge.

The guide went off to see how near were Wild Edna's guards, and soon returned with the news that a single guard was posted a mile further up the canyon.

"But I'll wager that's slathers more on 'em cluss by," he said by way of conclusion.

The camp was accordingly transferred several

hundred yards to the western side of the mountain, and out of such danger as Sir Fleming had apprehended.

At last night fell over the peaks, and preparations were made to "turn in."

All were more or less anxious about the non-appearance of Old Avalanche, except Sir Fleming and Sir Bruce.

They were apparently unconcerned, or at least, they did not seem to care whether he returned or not.

"It is possible he may have been captured by the Indians," suggested Lady Maude, as they all stood grouped around the crackling camp fire.

"Y-a-s, et's possible, an' that's erbout all. I tell ye it takes a red-skin wi' a cast-iron he'd ter take ther Annihilator, all alone. I've knowed ov his escapin' from ther red warmints w'en they hed him all ready to roast—I hev, by gum. He's jes' as slippery as an eel, an' hes got as many lives as er spotted tom-cat."

"And as much tongue as a bayou alligator," put in Sir Bruce spitefully.

"Wal, to be sure, he ar' troubled wi' too much speech, but et ar' natteral fer him."

"How did he lose his ears?" asked Sir Harry.

"Oh! thet ar'a matter o' years ago. W'en ther old man war a boy, he's hull family war tuk by an Injun raidin' expedition, an' all killed but two—Avalanche an' his twin brother. Ther lat'er war sold to a Missouri rancher fer a song, w'ile the former war held for torture. W'en the day o' torture arriv', the lad's ears war shaved off by the chief's son, Crazy Horse, an' another young bravo named Idaho Bill. As Avalanche didn't squeal nor squirm in the operation, they, out o' Injun respect, permitted him to go free. Since then he's made things party hot fur the darned Soos, ye can bet."

"And his brother—what of him?"

"Dunno. Old Avalanche hain't never heerd from him sence that time, 'cept that he learned from the rancher that he'd started out in the world on his own hook. He mought be dead, or he moughtn't, jess as it happens."

After a few more words, the ladies retired to their tent, the noblemen threw themselves down near the fire to sleep, and Dan went on guard.

He made a tour up and down the canyon, but failed to discover any signs of prowlers. Doubtless the Indians hul' not yet penetrated the gorge, and as for the bandits, they probably meditated no mischief; so all was safe for the present.

Returning to camp the faithful fellow seated himself near the fire to ponder over the strange position into which he had been thrown.

But his eyes grew heavy, and despite his efforts to keep awake he soon fell fast asleep.

The hours rolled by.

The camp-fire burned low and the canyon was filled with dense shadows. In her tent, Lady Milburn was restless and wakeful. Her thoughts were of such a nature that she could not repose. Lady Maude lay beside her, sleeping sweetly, but my lady couln't enjoy the same peaceful blessing,

"I have a foreboding of coming danger," she murmured, as she at last arose to a half-sitting position, and peered around her. "I wonder what it means? Can the Indians be creeping upon us?"

Through an aperture in the blankets, a faint glimmer of light from the expiring fire shone into the tent.

Instinctively my lady drew her jeweled watch from its place in her belt.

The hour was midnight; the camp and the awful mountain solitude were hushed in slumber.

Casting a shawl about her shoulders, and rising to her feet, she stepped from the tent and stood in the open air.

All of the men lay prone upon the grass, sound asleep, save old Dan; for, though he was less in unconsciousness, he retained an upright, sitting posi-

tion, his knotty hands clasped over the muzzle of his pet rifle.

So peacefully was he sleeping that Lady Milburn could not bear to disturb him.

"Poor fellow," she murmured, sympathetically, "let him enjoy himself. He is fatigued, I'll warrant."

She shivered a trifle at the crisp mountain air, and drew closer to the fire. Then, involuntarily, she raised her eyes toward the top of the frowning Flat Butte. As she did so, she gave a low, stifled cry.

Great Heaven! What was this she saw? Was she dreaming, or was it reality?

The summit was illuminated by a mighty bonfire, which lit up the northern sky to a blood red glow. Standing at the edge overlooking the canyon was a tall, spectral figure, clothed in snowy white, with a beard of the same color that reached nearly to his feet.

In his hand he held an instrument resembling a baton, and he was wildly waving this to and fro, while faintly downward on the breeze floated the strains of a weird chant.

With dilated eyes, Lady Milburn watched and listened. Then suddenly the spectral figure seemed to see her, for he ceased his song and pointed one long menacing finger down toward her, as if in terrible anger. She grew deathly faint and endeavored to collect her senses. But her head swam wildly, her limbs refused to support her, and with an awful, piercing shriek she sunk upon the ground, insensible.

CHAPTER VII.

THE THUNDER-STORM O' DESTRUCTION BURSTETH FORTH

On—on, leaped the frightened horse, on whose back were the two straggling men—Avalanche endeavoring to get his enemy's knife into a fatal spot, the savage desperately writhing and twisting to get free. Finally, however, he gave a gurgling groan, and leaned back in the scout's arms. He was dead.

The Annihilator had touched him in the fatal spot; he gave up without a cry.

Skillfully disengaging his feet from the stirrups, Old Avalanche permitted him to topple off into the grass, and then he was master of the horse.

By this time he was right in the camp, and as it would be useless to attempt retreat, he urged on the flying steed by pricking it with his knife-point, and away they rushed straight down through camp-fires and clumps of Indians like a hurricane wind.

Shrieks of surprise and anger went up from a hundred throats, and high above all roared the stentorian voice of the dauntless scout.

"Kerwhoop! hayr, we kim—ther great an' arful Norweegjan snow-slide o' destruction, and the sev'nious errupshun o' demolishen an' subversion. Cl'ar de track, ye ondecent imps o' stove-black; git out o' ther track o' ther boreal breeze o' annihilation, or by ther bosom-studs o' Generale Washington, I'll bumfusticate ye like all natur'l!"

On—on, dashed the spirited horse and his more spirited rider—on like the wind, and still the surging swarm of red-skins grew denser and thicker.

Suddenly Old Avalanche made a discovery that had hitherto escaped his notice. A roaring camp-fire was burning in the entrance to the canyon. Forms, tall and grim, stood in its light, and he knew they were Indians.

Still, he was determined to break through their ranks, if such an act were possible, and gain the gorge beyond.

On he sped, through the heart of the camp, and, strange to say, as soon as the wily red-men became convinced that he was heading for the canyon, not a hand was raised to stop him. Instead, the screaming horde closed in after him, and followed, yelling at his horse's heels.

At first he was unable to comprehend their mo-

tive, but not long, however, was he to be left in a state of doubt.

As he approached the entrance he made the startling discovery that the mouth of the canyon was rammed full of painted savages through whom no man or beast could for a moment hope to break. Plainly, he was in an Indian trap.

The over-exultant demons were yelling in his face, at his back, and on either side of him. Swarms of the dancing and screeching imps were crowding up from every hand.

Escape seemed an impossibility.

What man could hope to brave hundreds of brawny warriors, all armed, many of them with the most improved weapons. Surely there was not a shadow of a chance. Old Avalanche reined in his steed, and glared about him as does a hunted tiger when at bay. In a few seconds at the furthest the howling couriers of Satan would be upon him.

Should he yield and allow himself to be taken a prisoner, or, worse still, be slaughtered, then and there?

No! a hundred times, no.

It was not the nature of the old man to willingly give up. There must be a struggle first, and in that struggle more than one Sioux dog would bite the dust.

"Yas, blast the'r dirty skins!" he growled gazing at the horde as all came rushing on. "ef they take t' Norweegjan avalanche wif it has knowin' ef, et will be cur'us."

He set his teeth together with a click, and replacing the knife in his belt, drew and cocked his two handsome revolvers, one of which he held ready in each hand, for instant use.

Nearer and nearer trotted the savages. They well knew the desperate character with whom they had to deal. They all, had ever met or heard of him and his prowess, and they knew he never pulled a trigger on the same man, twice! Then, too, the average American savage is crafty, cunning and stealthy. When he can strike a blow with any surety of success, and when there is a show for his own escape, he will do it. Sometimes, superior numbers will urge him to greater risks, but put him before a bare man, and the red-skin is wary as a fox.

The Sioux came to a halt just out of rifle range, and appeared to hesitate.

The figure of the splendid horse and its watchful rider, as they remained outlined against the starlit sky, looked a formidable object to attack. In the chambers of those two revolvers, which he took pains to display, were fourteen lives—fourteen deaths!

There could be no doubt of that. He never missed his mark.

In the midst of this hesitation, two figures were trying to urge on the painted hell-hounds.

One was a brawny Indian chief, who wore his hair down over his shoulder—an evil, brutal-looking fellow, with eyes as red as fire, and lips thick and flabby like a negro's. You ask who is this? No one who has seen the notorious chief, Crazy Horse, once would need to ask. Once seen he is not easily to be forgotten. The other man is a half-breed associate whose name is Idaho Bill—or William Cummings. This well-suited pair are urging on the savages, by curses and threats. Old Avalanche's eyes lit up as he recognized Idaho Bill. Crazy Horse was not so easily placed by him, for he could only catch an occasional glimpse of his features. But he knew Idaho Bill in an instant, and his fingers worked nervously about the pistol-triggers. Oh! if he would only come within range!

Finally, the two chiefs succeeded in animating their warriors. They came stealthily on, watching the scout in half-terror and rage. He seemed so cool, that they could but admire, hate, and fear him all at the same time.

It was understood throughout the horde, that Old Avalanche was to be taken alive. The scout, him-

self, easily guessed this, else he would have been shot down before.

But if they counted on an easy victory, they were greatly mistaken.

No sooner was the flash of a pistol to be seen than the Annihilator commenced a destructive fire to the right, left and in front, and for every shot he aimed, an Indian fell.

It required but the space of a few seconds to empty the chambers of both revolvers, and then a deafening howl of triumph went up from the redskins, for they realized that the scout had nothing now left for use but his knife and rifle. On they leaped toward their prize, making the night ring with their horrible yells.

"Take him alive!" shouted a voice from the background. "Take him alive!"

A grim, defiant smile flitted across the features of the Annihilator, as he heard these words. No sooner had he emptied the chambers of his revolvers, than, by a deft movement, he extracted them, and replaced them by duplicate chambers, filled with cartridges!

Consequently he was again ready for business. Crack! crack! went the weapons, now aimed toward the weakest spot in the enemy's ranks, and every shot told with deadly effect. One after another dropped in his track, and the scout wheeled his steed and bore fiercely down against the place where most had fallen, firing as he went.

Involuntarily the astounded redskins shrunk to one side, making an opening to the prairies beyond. This was what the scout had anticipated, and he urged his horse on.

Suddenly one brave bolder than the rest, and a perfect giant in size, sprung forward and seized the flying scout by the leg, to which he firmly clung, and attempted to unseat him. At first Old Avalanche nearly lost his equilibrium, but he managed to keep in the saddle and finish discharging his pistols. Then he quickly thrust them into his belt, and drew his knife.

The red Hercules tugging at his leg seemed determined not to let go; his grip was like a vise. The flying horse had now borne them out of the midst of the savages into the savanna beyond the fires.

Grasping the saddle-bow with one hand for support, the scout made a parry at the red-skin's wrists, and though he cut them to the bone, the desperate brave still clung on, and, by a mighty jerk, succeeded in hurling his victim off onto the ground.

Ere Old Avalanche could clear himself, the horse had dashed away.

"Cuss ye!" he gritted, pinioning the savage to the ground, "I'll earn ye w'ot et ar' to blockade er Norwayan avalanche, ye copper-bued hippopotamus. Take that!"

He buried his knife in the naked bosom, and the next instant had leaped to his feet and was away through the darkness.

The whole horde were now swarming after him in mad pursuit.

He must have a horse, or vain would be the attempt to escape. The enemy could chase him down ere he could run half a mile. So he shaped his course toward the corral, whither the horses were guarded.

The savages anticipated him, and before he was scarcely aware of it, he beheld a dozen sweeping down upon him.

Had they discovered him? He did not wait to see, but threw himself in the tall grass and crept with great alacrity out of their path.

With beating heart he awaited the result. Would they pass by?

No! they had seen him, and were once more shaping their course toward where he was crouching. He could hear their excited shouts, and knew that the rest of the savages were all fleeing toward the corral to mount.

Concealment was now of no further use, so he sprang to his feet and leaped determinedly on.

As he ran he loaded both of his revolvers with fresh cartridges, and retained them in either hand for ready use.

On—on he leaped, silently and desperately, his feet scarcely touching the ground, so light was he of step.

He could hear a confused babel of hoarse yells, now, off toward the camp, which apprised him of the fact, that the larger share of the gang were mounted, and ready for the chase. The first dozen had now gained a distance of within twelve rods.

On—on; then suddenly he stumbled over some object which was lying in the grass, and fell prostrate. But he was on foot again, in a twinkling, and dashing swiftly away.

Next, he heard a noise directly at his heels, as if somebody was dogging him. With a growl of desperation, he drew back the hammer of one of the revolvers, and wheeled about.

As he did so there came to his hearing a familiar "ba-a-a," and Florence Nightingale came bounding joyfully up.

"Hello, ole boy," saluted the scout, with an appreciative grin. "So ye're a-kickin', hey? Wal, kin erlong. Things ar' kinder brisk, jes' now, so we'll nessessarily hev ter git!"

Once more he turned and darted on, the affectionate and knowing goat bringing up the rear. On came the savages yelling with triumph.

On, for five moments more; then the dauntless Annihilator stopped, stock-still. He saw now, the cause of their yells of triumph. There were mounted Indians in front, behind and on either side of him; he was perfectly surrounded!

CHAPTER VIII.

WILD EDNA'S VISIT—JOSIAH HOGG, Esq.

LADY MILBURN'S scream brought the camp to their feet in a jiffy. Dan Coleswell was the first to spring to her side, to be immediately followed by Sir Harry, Bruce and Fleming.

The insensible woman was borne to the light of the camp-fire, and the old guide procured a handful of water and dashed it into her face.

"I wonder w'at ked've skeer'd her?" said he, as he peered about while he added fuel to the fire. "My nostrils don' scent Injuns, or I shed say she seen one!"

"There may be prowlers around," replied Sir Harry, uneasily. "Perhaps it would be well for you to scout about the neighborhood, and learn for certain."

Dan accordingly seized his rifle and set out into the gloom, while the others set about restoring Lady Milburn to consciousness. In the midst of the efforts Lady Maude came flying out of her tent.

"Mamma, mamma; where is she?" she cried, in anguish. "She is gon'!"

Then as her gaze fell upon the prostrate and apparently lifeless form, she burst into a flood of tears.

"Be quiet," said Sir Harry, soothingly. "Mother has only fainted. Something has frightened her!"

After several applications of water, her ladyship gave signs of returning consciousness, and then with a sudden spasm and gasp, she gave vent to a stifled cry, and sat bolt upright.

Her face was very pale and her eyes wild and burning with an unnatural fire. The moment she was fully awakened to the knowledge of her situation, she shuddered violently, and to the crest of the mighty Flat Butte turned her horrified gaze. Great Heaven! it was gone!

No longer was the spectral figure standing at the edge of the precipice; all traces of the blood-red bonfire had disappeared, and the summit was enveloped in its mantle of impenetrable gloom.

"Oh! Henry, Henry!" she cried in piteous accents, "why did you come back to haunt me—to drive me almost mad with despair?"

"My dear," said Sir Fleming, advancing, "what gave you asthme? What caused you to faint?"

She shuddered, as he laid his hand upon her shoulder.

"What did I see?" she repeated, turning on him almost savagely—"what did I see, to cause me to swoon away? I will tell you. On the crest of your mountain-top, wrapped in a halo of glory, I saw the spirit of your victim—of my poor, long-lost husband, Sir Henry. I begin to understand you more than I did at first—to comprehend your baseness and treachery. You told me this was not the mountain-top from which Sir Henry fell. You lied! His accusing spirit came back to give proof of your lie!"

Sir Fleming turned red and white by turns, but finally managed to emit a harsh, sarcastic laugh.

"You are demented, Hetty," he replied, with a dubious shake of his head. "I was a fool for ever permitting you to come out on this wild-goose chase. Each day is increasing your mania, and by the time we get back to England, if we ever do, you will have to go into a private asylum!"

Again she turned toward him, her dark eyes blazing with indignation.

"And you will place me there?"

"I will place you there!"

"You *will not!*" cried Sir Harry, pushing the baronet back, and standing between him and Lady Milburn. "You forget that I am here to defend her!"

"No, young man, I forget nothing. But, mind you, I am master of that woman, so step aside, or it will be the worse for you."

But Sir Harry folded his hands proudly across his breast, and glared at the other fearlessly.

"Come on!" he said, coolly. "I am ready to protect the mother that gave me birth, against you or a score more of your stamp. You are a tyrant, a coward, and a designing knave, and I defy you!"

At first Sir Fleming seemed imbued with the courage and towering strength of a giant; but, under the unflinching gaze of Sir Harry, he gradually cowed, and what threatened at one moment to be a battle, was nothing but a war of eyes.

"You shall pay dearly for all these insults, my young hotspur!" he hissed as he turned on his heel, and began pacing to and fro in front of the fire.

"I fear you not, Sir Fleming," was the cool rejoinder; then Sir Harry returned to his mother.

"Now, mother, tell me the cause of your faint."

"I can tell you nothing, Harry, except what I told him. A short time ago I left my tent, for I could not sleep, and came out here into the open air. You were all asleep, even the guide, and so I did not disturb you till I fainted. While I stood here by the fire, my gaze involuntarily wandered to the top of yonder peak. Then, oh! such a sight I beheld! The whole summit was aglow with the glare of a blood-red bonfire, which burned on the top. At the edge, stood it, Harry—the spirit of my poor husband and your and Mandie's father. He was wrapped in a white, ghostly robe, and his long white beard nearly swept the ground. In his hand he held a baton, and while he kept time with it, he chanted a terrible song. Suddenly he seemed to see me, for he pointed one finger down at me, as if in anger. A deathly faintness came over me, and I swooned away. As you see, the terrible apparition has vanished."

"But, mother, you have imagined all this. You must have been walking in your sleep and dreamed all this absurdity."

"It is not absurd, my son; nothing but the truth. I was as wide awake as you are now, and beheld the specter as clearly as I now behold you."

"This seems incredible," said Sir Harry, shaking his head doubtfully. "There is no such a thing as ghosts and specters, you know—a fact which plainly goes to show that you were deceived. Mother, dear, do you know I have sometimes been forced to doubt our entire sanity, when you persist in venturing into this wild and howling wilderness, merely for the sake of gathering the bones of my poor lost father?"

Lady Milburn gazed at her noble-looking and manly son, sorrowfully.

"Oh! Harry, are you, too, losing faith in me—you too turning from me in this hour of need?" she groaned, piteous tears standing in her eyes.

"No, dearest, sweetest mother, no!" he cried, clasping her impulsively to his breast. "I will not desert or disbelieve in you. I will do all a son can do, to aid in the last sad rites due my poor lost father. If it be within the power of man, I will recover the bones that have been bleaching in Death Gulch these twenty years, and inter them in the ancient vaults of Lynnwood."

"Do this, my own true son," sobbed her ladyship, "and I will bless you—God will bless you. I shall then be ready to die."

The remainder of the night passed away rapidly; Sir Fleming and his confidant, Sir Bruce, were talking, apart, to themselves, as also were Lady Milburn and her two children.

About day-dawn, old Dan returned and reported that there were no signs of Indian intruders to be discovered yet. The canyon was clear as far as he had been able to penetrate.

When Sir Harry related to him the story told by Lady Milburn, he nodded his old shaggy head comprehensively, and went on about preparing the breakfast, making no comment on it.

After breakfast he took an ax and bade Sir Harry follow him. He led the way down the canyon for about a mile, after which he came to a halt, and pointed upward into the precipitous wall of rock, on the northern side of the gorge. Far up, there was just discernible a round black hole in the rock, scarcely large enough to admit of the passage of a man's body.

"Ye perceive et, eh?" grinned the guide.

"Yes," replied Sir Harry. "But what of it? 'Tis twenty feet high."

"Exactly, an' thar's a big fat b'ar in that same hoel."

"How know you that?"

"I see'd him, las' nite. He war standin' at ther entrance, up thar, an' grinnin' down at me as if he'd like ter an' int his jaws on me. 'So,' sez I, 'my fine feller, I'm goin' ter 'n'int mine on ye, an' hyar I am reddy fer ther job.'"

"How, in the name of wonder, could a bear get so high up as that, with this smooth face of rock to climb?"

"Dunno. Think probably thar's bin a flood in these ere gulch, 'long back, an' ther pesky critter got washed up thar."

"But how could he live and be fat without food?"

"Mought've hed cubs, yo obseve, barrin' et ain't a he b'ar, an' sich bein' the case she's chawed 'em up."

"Eat her own young?"

"Why, yes. Thet's nothin' new. Now, ye git yer peater reddy, an' when I git ther ax ter choppin' 'g'in' ther rock, Mr. B'ar will show his head, up vander. You must then plug erway at him, full tilt. Ef ye don't tumble him over most like's not he'll bounce down at ye. When he do, ye turn tail, an' light fer camp, an' I'll knock ther star spanyielded banners out o' him wi' my little hatchet."

"Very well. Go ahead."

Advancing to the rock, the guide gave three or four resounding whacks upon it with the ax; then scampered back from beneath the hole.

The next instant there was a savage growl, and Bruin came lumbering to the mouth of his retreat, to ascertain the cause of the disturbance.

Sir Harry fired simultaneously with his appearance, and sent a well-directed bullet square into the left eye.

"Good!" cried Dan, as the monster came tumbling down to the ground quite dead.

"Thet was a fine shot."

The bear proved to be a male, and as soon as he could be conveyed back to camp, Dan analyzed his stomach, and found sufficient evidence to satisfy

him that the mountain cave was furnished with both water, grass, and bushes, bearing green food.

About noon, Wild Edna was seen coming down the canyon at a leisurely gallop, and drew up at the camp-fire around which all of the occupants were sitting.

As they gazed at the fresh young beauty—so perfect in face and form, and so easy of carriage and speech, not one could deny that she was the most magnificent type of woman they had ever seen.

She was attired in a superb silk riding-habit, relieved here and there by lace and sparkling diamonds, and confessedly, she looked more like a countess or a queen than did either of the ladies Milburn, for all they had been born, bred and cultured in royal society.

Her smile was like a burst of sunshine, her bow of recognition a model of sauciness, and her general manner, vivacious and pleasing—fascinating.

"Good-morning," she said, as she surveyed the group critically, while her fair hand toyed with her horse's mane. "I hope this sunrise finds you all well and enjoying yourselves."

"All well," replied Sir Harry, smiling rather grimly. "but hardly in a mood for enjoyment. Our situation is not conducive to pleasure."

"Probably not. That, however, is not my fault. You should pay your toll and leave for parts more agreeable."

"We should not submit to such an imposition—more, will not!"

"Oh! of course you have a perfect right to consult your own notion about that. If you value the superfluous stock of money you have, and the diamonds you wear, more than you do your life, so be it. I would not sell my life, I'm sure, for all the wealth on the continent!"

"Yet you are periling it for money!"

"No, I am not. I am just as free from danger of death as can be imagined."

"How so?"

"Because no one will dare to insure their own death, by taking my life!"

"So? Well, for instance, suppose that I were to shoot you, now, or otherwise make way with you, what would be the result?"

"If I did not return to my home inside of an hour, my men are given to understand that harm has befallen me. They would mount, sweep down upon you, and hack you to pieces—tear you limb from limb. They would not even stop to question you as to what had become of me, so great would be their rage."

"They must be a pack of demons, then!"

"I hope they will never have cause to attack you and thereby prove themselves such."

"Probably they never will have."

After a little further talk, Wild Edna said:

"You then still refuse to pay the toll?"

"Yes—a thousand times, yes. Understand me, lady, that it is not the greed for gold that causes this refusal, but a sense of honor and proper regard for what is due to law and principle. As gentlemen we must refuse!"

"Very well. Permit me to say, however, that no matter how keen your sense of honor and justice may be, now, I am confident that the 'eleventh hour' will bring you around to admit our demands fully."

"Entertain no hopes in that direction. You will be doomed to disappointment, I fear."

"If I am doomed to disappointment, sir," said Wild Edna, as she gathered up her bridle-reins, "you will be doomed to death!"

Then she wheeled her horse, and galloped off up the ravine.

Sir Harry's eyes followed her with such a yearning gaze that vivacious little Lady Claude whispered to Lady Milburn:

"Do look at him, mamma! I really believe that Harry is infatuated with that singular woman."

"Is this so, my son?" asked Lady Milburn, turn-

ing an anxious and inquiring glance upon him. "Is it possible you can entertain the slightest degree of admiration for that shameless creature?"

"Quite possible, madam," he replied, a trifle bitterly, while a faint flush of anger stole over his face.

He failed to admire or appreciate the appellation her ladyship bestowed upon the Girl Bandit.

"Then I beg you smother any such feeling at once. It is both absurd and mortifying. I am surprised at such an exhibition of your taste. I am sure none of your ancestors ever deigned to look so low as to bestow admiration upon a confessed outlaw and outcast."

"Not? Well, I do not care a whit whether they did or no. I am my own judge in such matters, you must know, mother, and shall permit no abuse of this maiden, in my presence. To me she is something strangely sweet and pure."

And having thus delivered himself, Sir Harry rose and sauntered away.

"There is where the young serpent stung its giver," sneered Sir Fleming; but his words were wasted on Lady Milburn, who was plunged into a deep reverie.

The afternoon dragged slowly on, and all except Sir Harry drowsed away, before the camp-fire. There was nothing they could do to better their situation, so they concluded it policy to take things as easy as circumstances would permit. In all probability, Old Avalanche had deserted them, and they had nothing to hope for from any quarter.

About an hour before sunset, all were aroused by the sound of a voice, singing a jangling snatch of outlandish song, and the tramp of horses' feet; then, gazing up the canyon toward the banditti's retreat, it at once was perceivable that they were about to have a visitor—and such a visitor!

A scrawny, vicious-looking mule was leisurely approaching camp, on whose bony back sat a long, lank and lean individual, whose general appearance might have provoked a smile among the most sober crowd of spectators.

He was undeniably a mixture of the old school of Yankees and Kentuckians, with a sprinkling of both Texas and Missouri in his make-up. His exceeding length and lankness, to which was added a face of grim, humorous and angular contour, adorned by tallow-hued Burnsides, and tanned and freckled shockingly. His hair was not unlike the Burnsides in color, and, since some ancient date, had apparently not made the acquaintance of a comb. His eyes were decidedly "auburn," and his nose as decidedly Roman. His attire consisted of a variety of garments, ranging all the way from the soiled checkered pantaloons and heavy brogans to the untanned wolf-skin shirt and squirrel-skin cap. A flaming yellow neck-tie encircled his throat, and a gay red-white-and-blue sash about his waist contained an enormous pair of horse-pistols and a Bowie of formidable dimensions. These, with a huge musket strapped to his back, were his only weapons.

He had apparently not seen the camp yet, for as he jogged along he was gazing at the mammoth walls on either side of him, while he sung, in a loud, cracked voice:

'Said I ter Sally Hotchkiss,
Said Sally unter me—
Said Sally's dad an' Sally's mam,
Said all ther tribe ter me—
'Bill, ye ar' a great 'un;
Ter fame's pinnerkle ye'll rise;
Ye'll be er whoplin' poet,
An' great at gospel truth.'

"Whoa up, Prudence, thar; w'ot's ahead?"

The latter exclamation, as the eccentric traveler caught sight of the camp.

"Great cow-bells o' Milton an' Longfeller. Ef thar ain't a camp rite yar, ye kin shave me wi' yer toe-nails Ha-a-a-y, thayr, strangers, hello! Howdy, do!"

"Perty hevy, at yer service. How's yersel', Christian?" replied old Dan.

"Waal, I'm on ern average. Jedge ye hain't got no 'jection ef a seller war ter squat down among ye."

"Nary a 'jection. Cum along up an' let's inspeck ye."

"Oh! gallant nite o' chivalry
I'll hasten ter
Embrace this opportunitchy,"

sung the stranger, and giving the mule a dig in the ribs, he continued:

"On, Prudence, on!
Charge, Cordelia, charge!"

"As Shakespear sed to ther preecher as they proached ther beer saloon:-

"Our toilsome jernney ar' ended!"

In a moment more the camp was reached, and raising a long leg over the mule's back the stranger fell upon the ground.

When standing he was about six feet six, and as comical a looking human, as the spectators had ever been so unlucky as to meet.

"By thunder, ye're a sight, you are!" said Dan, as he finished his inspection. "Who in Cain are ye, ole hoss?"

"That, my Christian friend, I am fortunately able to tell ye. I flourish under ther holt o' Josiah William Hogg, Es-q., at yer service—Hogg spelt wi' tew G's ef ye'd jes' s' l'eve."

"An' why wi' two G's?"

"Decawse et hes bin' ther priveledges o' my ancestors ter call themselves Hogg, fer w'ich I ain't ter blame. Fustly they spelt it H-o-g, Hog. But, now, ef a seller's goin' ter be a hog at tall he may's well go et "hull hog or none," I konkluded tew t'apt teno G's!"

"Ye're travelin' or goin' sumwhar. I take it."

"Yas, I guess so. My professy়un leeds me everywhar. Sir, I am a poet—a descendant from ther great an' immortail Shakespear—a secont cuzzin o' Longfeller an' au an't ter Byron o' Linn; I am Josiah Banu Hogg, esquire, at yer service;—Hogg wi' two G's!"

CHAPTER IX.

THE POET O' THE NOR'WEST—GONE!

A GENERAL laugh followed, and Josiah Hogg was forthwith made welcome to the camp.

"Much 'quainted 'bout these diggin's?" asked old Dan, as he helped the visitor to a huge slice of bear-meat.

"Waal, y-a-s;—'bout on an average. Ye remember this 'ere division o' ther erqualitor ar' renowned fur ets poetry o' grace an' motion, so I've tuk more'n ordinary pains ter cult'yvate a thorough knowledge o' et. Every darn thing ye see or meet wi' out hayr is chock-full o' poetry. Now, fur instance, hayr's these big beep o' rock, vulgarly called mounting. Thar's sumthin' sublime an' cow-inspiring erbout that upheevyalo o' granite an' lavy. As Milton sed tew old Jonas Snatcher, w'en they war killin' hogs;—not H-o-g-g-s—but H-o-g-s; as Milton war sayin':

"Friend, thee, o' Jonas Snatcher
Wilt thou becum a watcher?
Jist behold that grand finale
Ther poetry in that porker's tail."

"Whar kin ye beet that, now? Jist obsarve ther path-hoss in that rino. I allus sed Milton war thres sides o' a slab-fence on composin' poetry, but w'en he scribbled them lines, I war reddy ter sw'ar fer him."

"What is thar this sid o' ther River Jordan more poetic than the vibrating an' graceful motion o' a Porker's tail? Echo ans'ers what?"

"You are a brainless idiot!" grunted Sir Fleming. In disgust, while the others were laughing, heartily.

"You have no more poetry about you than a crow!"

"A Crow Injun? Waal, that's jes' as one figger it. Darn my socks, ef I ain't smarter nor a Crow thief, ye can baptize me in a Hog-trough;—not a H-o-g-g, Hog-trough, tho'. I am ther boss po' o' ther Nor'west—ther great sublime romancer o' ther Powder river range. Wawkeen Miller hain't a damed circumstance ter me. I'm a descendant o' old Jim Shakespear, a secont cuzzin o' Longfeller, an' a maiden a'nt o' Byron O'Lynn, say nuttin' 'bout my inter-relation ter Mr. Burns an' Jim Fisk—all on 'em shinin' lights o' ther pu:session. I'm sum ther poe'cal myself, ef I do say et. Thar war ther time that Sally Marier Billson shuke 'me, becaus I wouldn't treat her fer lemonade, at the picnic down in Bill Tubb's orchard, fer instance. Oh, creation! warn't I b'ilin' mud then!"

"I jist guv my overalls a hitch, an' lit out fer hum, two-forty on ther hum stretch."

"Rewengel!" cried I, an' grabbin' up a pen I writer ther editer o' ther Duck Holler *Exam* no. 1, an' told him o' Sally's perfidy, an' arter scribblin' sum poetry, I set down an' wept tears o' shagrin an' de-feet.

"Waal, in ther next number o' ther *Examiner*, et cum out—right plum on ther fust page. Oh! boiled 'taters an' baked beans! warn't I nearly run over wi' joy! I'll jes' guv ye a few lines

"Thou art so false, an' yet so sickle,
Yer enough site sourer'n enny pickle;
No teers adown my cheek do trickle,
Because ye ain't wu'th a courtersut nickle."

"Very suggestive poetry, that," said Sir Bruce; "but as you have favored us with quite enough for the present, suppose you tell us how you got past the banditti."

"The banditti?"

"Exactly; the outlaws that infest this canyon."

"Spect ye're crazy, ain't ye?"

"Certainly not! Why do you ask?"

"Sure ye ain't a peg behind yer compass—that ye ain't out o' yer he'd?"

"Positively sure. I asked you how you got through the canyon, without encountering the t'ieves."

"No, ye didn't, nuther."

"I say I did!"

"I say ye didn't!"

"What did I say, then?"

"Waal, fustly ye axed ter tell ye how I got thr u ther banditier, an' then, ther outlaws."

"Well?"

"Waal, ye didn't say nutkin' 'bout mountain theees, did ye?"

"I meant it, all the same."

"Ye did? Waal, that ar' a differ'nt side o' a ben-koop. Ye shed allus stick ter ther truth. As Danyel Webster sed to the settin' goose:

"Ye shed nevyer disgrest
While confined ter yer nest."

That's the case wi' you. Ye shed nevyer disgrest nor diversify.

"Diversification is the
Cuss o' creashun!"

"But you haven't answered my question yet. How did you get through the lines of the outlaws?"

"Perty good b'ar-meet, this," replied the Nor'west Poet evasively, taking a huge mouthful of the delicious food.

"See here!" now yelled Sir Bruce, as, thoroughly exasperated, he clutched his visitor savagely by the shoulder; "I want no more of this trifling. Tell me确切ly how you passed through the lines of Wild Edna's banditti."

Josiah scratched his shaggy head for a moment, thoughtfully.

"Ye're sure ye ain't gone cl'r crazy, eh?" he ventured, making another unblushing dive at the bear-steak.

Sir Bruce grew fairly livid, and those around the fire burst into another fit of immoderate laughter.

"Curse you!" he howled, imprisoning Josiah's long, crane-like neck in his two hands; "do you want me to choke the life out of you? If not, answer me at once."

"Ye wanter kno' ef I kim thr'u' ther canyon an' see'd a banditter?"

"Yes; go on!"

"Waal, I didn't see a livin' banditter—shave me wi' a barn-shovel ef I did!"

"Impossible! You could not have come through the canyon without having been stopped by them."

"I didn't cum thr'u'."

"Didn't come through? How then?"

"I slid over!"

"How do you make that out?"

"Why, I an' Prudence Cordelia thar rid down on a streak o' greased lightnin'."

Sir Bruce turned away in disgust. He had exhausted his patience and failed with a man, who, it was plain to see, was "nobody's fool." It began to be pretty evident that the visitor was not so "green" as he appeared.

Accordingly, no more efforts were made to pry into his secrets, all trusting that he would explain whenever he felt in the right mood.

The night came on and during the evening Josiah kept the camp in a continual titter with his horrible efforts at poetry, he quoting bad Shakespeare and Longfellow by the yard. When time arrived to turn in, Dan was posted on guard, and the rest lay down about the fire and went to sleep, with the exception of the ladies, who retired to their tent.

The night passed without incident, and morning dawned once more.

Josiah was up with the camp, and appeared perfectly at home.

Breakfast had been done away with and all were lounging around on the grass, when a horseman was seen coming down the canyon from the direction of the bandits' retreat. A single glance sufficed to show that it was not Wild Edna, but instead, a handsome young fellow of two-and-twenty, who resembled her somewhat. He was lithe and graceful of form, with a purely Spanish complexion, hair of the raven's hue, and drooping mustache of the same shade. His attire was semi-Mexican, and fitted him neatly, his head being crowned by a jaunty sombrero, while a sash at his waist contained a small arsenal of polished weapons.

As he rode up he doffed his hat politely.

"You come in the place of Wild Edna, if I mistake not," said Sir Harry, returning the salutation, coldly.

"I do, senor. The Girl Bandit being a trifle indisposed this morning, she commissioned me to wait upon you in her absence, to learn if you have changed your decision in regard to the toll."

"Then you can return to your Girl mistress, and tell her that we shall *never* come to her terms!"

"As you like, senor. To-morrow you will receive the last visit from us, and if you lose that chance of acceding to our terms, your fate will be sealed. On the eleventh day, then, after to-morrow—which will be the thirty-first of this month—the flood-gates of Lake Tice will be raised, and a deluge of water will sweep through Devil Canyon. If you are in it, your fate you can well imagine. We shall not hold ourselves responsible for your death, having given you these chances for life and liberty, and ten days to effect your escape in."

"But God will, young fellow," put in Josiah, impressively. "As Jim Shakespear sed to Sam Skinner, w'en Sam got boozy on hard cider, an' blamed ther cider-maker fer it—as Shakespear sed:

"Doan't use the name o' God in vain
In tippsiness or pain.
Fer yer own misdeeds yer ter blame—
God'll hold ye responsible all ther same."

"Now thar's dubble distilled essence o' truth an' religum in them vases, thar is.

"Many's ther time I've heard Shakespear say logical things, but he never put ther reel truth an' path-hoss inter figgers like he did in them lines. Another o'his anti-lotes o' wisdom war thi':

"Allus hold yerself responsible fer all y', an' then ef yo're counted out at ther great toll, ye won't be much disapp'nted!"

"You are truly a great m'rizer," said the bandit, with a shrug, "but we feel justified in demanding toll, and enforcing its payment. Consequently we cannot keep as close within the law as would perhaps be consistent with regard to our welfare in the great Hereafter."

"Your name—what is it?" said Sir Fleming, who had ordered Dan and Sir Bruce to cover the outlaw with their rifles.

"Nevada Sam, at your service."

"Very well, Nevada Sam; please consider yourself my prisoner. Dismount, and deliver up your arms."

Nevada Sam smiled, but did not offer to obey.

"You are a fool," he said coolly. "Did not my sister tell you what would befall you should you offer to molest her, on her former visit?"

"Your sister?"

"My sister, or Wild Edna, as you know her."

"Yes, I believe she threatened us with some nonsense about what might happen."

"Very well. I reply likewise. Offer me the least hindrance and you will hasten your own death!"

"What! do you dare to threaten me? Have a care, sir knave! She was a woman but you are *not*, and I do not fear to shoot you. Dismount!"

"I will dismount, if you so order," replied Nevada Sam, grimly; "but, recollect that if I do, your death is a certainty within an hour."

Sir Fleming quailed a trifle, and hesitated.

"You are at perfect liberty to go and come as you please!" cried Sir Harry, at this juncture. "That man does not command, here; consequently he has no authority, where I hold sway."

"Thanks," smiled the bandit. "You are wise, I see. No good could possibly come of holding me a prisoner."

Then, nodding to the men and raising his hat courteously to the ladies—particularly to Lady Maude, he wheeled his horse and dashed away.

"Now, sir," cried Sir Fleming, quite infuriated, as he confronted Sir Harry, "what have you to say for your insulting conduct, just now?"

Sir Harry laughed—laughed in his cool, tantalizing way.

"Because I thought your wings needed cropping again," he replied. "You were getting on too fast, and quite ignoring the fact that I was master."

"But you are *not* master!" shrieked Sir Fleming, white with passion, while his tremendous corporosity seemed to swell to twice its customary size, with indignation. "You are *not*, I say, and to teach you that I will endure your insolence no longer, I'll teach you who *is*, after this fashion!"

And raising a stout, gold-headed cane, which, since their camping in the canyon, had been his constant companion, he struck Sir Harry a heavy blow upon the head, felling him to the ground, insensible.

Ladies Milburn instantly began to scream in alarm, and while Sir Fleming and Sir Bruce assumed a defensive position, old Dan Coggswell and Josiah Hogg sprung forward in an offensive attitude.

"Ye durned skunk!" yelled the guide, "ain't ye ashamed o' this? I've half a noshun tew knock a star-spangled banyer out o' ye."

"Bully fer you, pard!" claimed Josiah, flourishing his long arms rapidly. "Let's giv' 'em a tanin', the ornery heethun. As Jim Shakespear uther say:

"A knockin' sort o' skirmmage
At punchin' uther's image,
Ar' only justy-fiable—
Et makes the body pliable."

"And as I feel kinder stiff, now, I propose we n'int our j'ints by walloppin' them ondecent ekers."

"Not nob!" cried Sir Harry, crawling to his feet, at this juncture—"let them alone. I'll settle both of 'em, before I am many suns older."

And with a flashing eye, the young nobleman started off to the little stream to wash the blood from his bruised cranium; for the cane had cut open the skin.

The remainder of the day, Sir Fleming and Lady Milburn kept aloof from the rest, and whiled away the time in conversation and smoking.

Night fell dark and threatening. Masses of black clouds filled the heavens, and the atmosphere was decidedly rainy.

After the evening meal had been prepared and dispatched, Josiah Hogg volunteered to stand guard, and so leaving him to his lonely vigil, the rest "turned in," to sleep.

About an hour before midnight the storm burst down in all its fury, and so great was its volume that the bottom of the canyon was quite submerged, thereby precluding the possibility of repose. Therefore, the ladies were bundled in the blankets, and all stood and took the pelting storm with good, bad or indifferent grace, as the case might be.

For an hour the war of the storm-gods waged furiously, and a perfect torrent of muddy water came dashing down the gorge.

But at last the rain ceased, as quickly as it had come, and the bottom became less submerged by degrees, until the site of the old camp was once more above water.

But so intense was the gloom that one could not see a finger before an eye, and it was only by a sense of groping, and the interchange of words, that the party could be collected. And, as there was no dry place to be had, it looked very probable that there would be no fire, or light on the subject till day-break.

"Are all here?" called Sir Harry, with a shiver, as he endeavored to peer around.

"I guess so," replied the familiar tones of Coggswell—"I am, at least. Mought call ther roll, ter—"

"Good. I will do so. Sir Fleming and Bruce, are you here?"

"Ayl ayl!" replied the two noblemen.

"And Ladies Milburn?"

"I am here," replied Lady Milburn; "but I do not see Maude."

"Lady Maude and Josiah Hogg!" called Sir Harry.

There was no reply. Again the call was repeated, but no answer.

A hurried and close search was then made, but without result. One thing was only too plain—*Lady Maude and the poet were gone!*

CHAPTER X.

A DARING ACT—"AN EAR FOR AN EAR."

We left Old Avalanche out in the open savanna, after his just having discovered the fact that he was completely surrounded by the howling Sioux.

Had they seen him?

Yes, very probably, or else why were they closing in around him? Faintly through the pall of inky darkness he could distinguish the shadowy outlines of the lurking horsemen, and by them, and the rustled sounds of their hoofs, he knew they were all moving toward one center, and that center was just where he was now standing.

"Humph!" he grunted, for a moment unresolved to act, "I rec'on ther grate Norwoegjan avab'e ar' in 'n orful dislikility. Ye kin skin me wi' li-peck, ef I kno' w'ot's best ter do."

Something certainly must be done. The savages were approaching nearer and nearer, and in a moment would be upon him.

At their coming and give himself up would be the initial step toward a horrible death.

"I'll spill a trifle more o' Injun blood, su'st, ennyhow," was the final conclusion, and tripping his knife he threw himself flat upon the ground.

Florence did likewise, and the two lay assilent and motionless as death. On came the savages and Old Avalanche could feel the ground jar as the cavalcade dashed up. Nearer and nearer they drew, and for fear of being trampled upon, the goat crawled closer to his master's side.

At last there was a shout, and the Indians drew rein in a small circle. Avalanche and Florence were lying *inside* of that circle!

Fortunately the grass was so tall that they were screened from view.

"The white dog has escaped!" sung out the gruff voice of Idaho Bill. "The Sioux are on a wrong scent."

"The pale chief errs," replied Rain-in-the-Face, who commanded a portion of the party. "Pale squaw come dis way."

"Ugh!" cried Scarlet Blade, a young chief, who had but recently won his spurs of chieftaincy. "Mo see um here—stand erect—look at Sioux—den he drop!"

"But he *not* here!" grunted Crazy Horse. "Scarlet Blade young brave. He no wise like Crazy Horse."

"Scarlet Blade look!" cried the eager chief, and springing from his saddle he commenced beating about in the grass, wiggling about on his hands and knees. "If white dog here, Scarlet Blade find um."

On around the circle he crawled, and on account of the darkness, the mounted savages were unable to keep track of his whereabouts, except when they would catch a sound to guide them.

Presently it was inferred by the deep silence that Scarlet Blade had halted in his search.

"Hey!" shouted Idaho Bill, with an oath, "w'ar ye goin', ye red imp? w'at ar' ye at so long?"

"What difference it make to you?" leered Crazy Horse. "Let Injun alone."

"Ugh!" cried the rough voice of Scarlet Blade, from the center of the circle, "Injun keep much still. Scarlet Blade found trail, Injun sit still on hoss. Scarlet Blade trail white dog under hosses belly!"

A moment later Crazy Horse was conscious that somebody or something was near him, and he made a vain attempt to peer down into the grass.

"Who dar?" he demanded, suspiciously. "Dat you, Scarlet Blade?"

"Um!" was the brief reply, and the rustling in the grass proclaimed that the chief was creeping away. Full ten moments passed; then a figure leaped from the grass, and onto the back of the rideless horse of Scarlet Blade.

"White dog no dar," said the disappointed voice of the chief. "He gone, an' Scarlet Blade git up!"

A derisive yell went up from the Indians in general.

"Scarlet Blade is a dog!" cried Crazy Horse, with contempt. Then turning in his saddle, he shouted, in Sioux:

"Away! away! all of you, except a hundred, who will go to the canyon mouth, where the others are! Wait for us! Scatter!"

The order was instantly obeyed. All of the swarming gang, except Crazy Horse, immediately spread out over the prairie, and began to scour about for the escaped Annihilator.

The chief then set out for the entrance to Devil's Canyon, followed by his detachment of braves.

Under the command of Idaho Bill, the savanna was thoroughly searched for a distance of four or five miles, in either direction; but not a trace of the much-feared and more hated Avalanche was to be found.

He had undoubtedly made good his escape into the mountains.

At last the blare of a trumpet caused the savages to relinquish the search, and turn back toward camp. Idaho Bill was among the last to do this,

Old Avalanche.

an' as he turned his animal's head he saw the horse of Scarlet Blade passing to his right.

"Hallo, there!" he shouted, "is that you, Injun Bill?"

"Ugh! dis Scarlet Blade," was the reply, and the horse came forward. "You Idaho Bill?"

"Yas, et's me. Cum along, ef you're a-goin' inter camp."

The outlaw gave his horse the spur, and was about dashing away, when a lasso, one end of which was secured to Scarlet Blade's saddle, fell gracefully around him and drew taut, thereby pinioning his arms to his side.

The next instant he was jerked from his saddle, and no sooner did he reach the ground than the figure of *Old Avalanche, the Annihilator*, was upon him.

Scarlet Blade had perished in that circle search, and the alert scout had donned his head-dress, transferred some of the Sioux's paint to his own face, and took possession of the horse.

It was a daring act, but his desperate position had inspired him with the determination to accomplish it, and he had succeeded admirably.

Thither and hitner over the savanna he had dashed among the other savages, hunting for himself, as it were, and whenever he could obtain a suitable chance, driving his knife into the heart of a red companion. And only by chance was it that he had fallen in with Idaho Bill.

Old Avalanche was upon him! To choke off the outlaw's yells was but the work of a moment, and in short order he lay upon the green carpet of the savanna, a helpless prisoner, bound hand and foot, and gagged.

"Thar!" grunted the Annihilator, as he finished his work, an' hoisted the outlaw up onto the saddle, after which he himself mounted; "thar! I observe et allus takes tew an' sometimes three, tew make a barg'in. Hey, Idaho Billiam, ain't them yer idees? Don't 'preeshate ober virtues o' ther grate, roarin' Norweegian Avalanche? Wal, I ken't help thet, my bulrush o' Moses. I'm's powerless to relieve' ye o' yer affixyuns, as a cat ar' tew let go onto a rat, arter she's fixed her fangs inter his rib-steak. Axident threw ye inter ther. way o' my lassy, an' now nuthin's moar established than thet ye've got ter ackumpenny a veritageble whirlygig o' rantank-erousness tew hes stopping-place—thet ye've got ter assoshate wi' a giunywine Norweegian snow-slide."

A groan from Idaho Bill was the only answer. He had sufficient cause to dread the Avalanche—to fear his vengeance.

Old Avalanche headed toward the northwest, and struck off into a gallop, carrying his prisoner with him. For hours he rode on, and at the blush of dawn, drew rein close in under cover of the towering mountains, at a spot where shade, water and grass were plenty. The outlaw was placed upon the ground, and tethering his horse out to graze, he set about finding food for himself and prisoner.

He soon succeeded in catching a few fat frogs from a stagnant buffalo wallow, and building a fire of buffalo—"chips," he roasted the luscious hind legs, thereby procuring a very palatable meal.

As soon as all was in readiness, the Annihilator removed the gag from the outlaw's mouth, and tendered him a portion of the food, which was readily accepted and devoured before the scout had scarcely begun on his. The breakfast was dispatched in silence, and when he had finished, *Old Avalanche* climbed up into a neighboring crag to take observations. As near as he could judge, he was something more than ten miles distant from the Sioux camp, and by the clear light of the morning that had now fully dawned, he could see that the camp was astir.

Smoke from many camp-fires rose in spiral columns toward the smiling blue skies, and a general activity and bustle were noticeable. A score or more of horses were being led from the corral, and

this told the scout that the Indians, or at least a portion of them, were going on the trail.

This trail was his own, and as he had taken no pains to hide it, he was aware how easy it would be for them to hunt him down.

"Yas, thet ar' w'at they're a-going tew do, or tew try to do," he muttered.

"Part on 'em's took persession o' ther gorge-mouth, an' t'other part ar' seriously reflectin' on takin' persession o' ther grate Avalanche. They've got it indentured inter ther noddles, thet they'd like ter interview a veritageble eppydanic o' extaminashen; but seem's thar mought be a terrifeck explosi'en o' confine'l terrificossity, ef they war tew encounter me, sayin' nuthin' erbout an arful loss o' Injun population, I deem it ther natcheral consequence o' fulhardiness to tarry here; so I'll proceed to absorchulate."

The scout turned and clambered down toward his own camp.

As he did so his ears were greeted with hoarse and frightened yells, evidently comin' from Idaho Bill. This quickened his movements, and in a few moments, he had gained the level ground, close to the camp. Here his eyes fell upon a scene both unexpected and ludicrous.

During the Annihilator's absence the prisoner evidently had been trying to climb to the back of the horse and make his escape, but had been surprised by an unexpected enemy. This was no other than the scout's wonderful "j'int," Florence Nightingale, who had opportunely arrived, and attacked the outlaw.

At the time of the Annihilator's *entree* upon the scene, the goat had succeeded in downing his victim, and was bunting him without mercy, rolling him over and over at every lunge, while Idaho Bill's shrieks of pain and rage made the welkin ring.

Old Avalanche gave a yell of ecstasy and sat down to watch the sport. Idaho Bill now saw him, and a torrent of blasphemous curses and oaths, broke from his lips.

Still *Old Avalanche* sat upon the ground, watching, and with a grim smile upon his furrowed countenance. This was sweet revenge for him—vengeance for previous injuries. At last, however, he perceived that the outlaw was nearly insensible, and with a whistle he called the vicious billy from his work of torture.

"That'll do fer the present, boyee," was the Annihilator's ejaculation as he patted the animal affectionately. "Ye stud ter yer work nobly a' ar' desarvin' o' thanks fer et. I think, tho' I'll tend tew Mr. Idaho Billiam, myself, now."

With these words he rose to his feet, drew his knife, and approached the outlaw, who lay groaning upon the grass.

Assisting him to a sitting position, he seated himself directly opposite and the two implacable foes eyed each other for some time, with belligerent glances. *Old Avalanche* was the first to speak.

"Young man," he said, slowly whetting the blood-stained knife in the palm of his hand, "hev ye got enny reekelexyun o' evyer leavin' seen me erfore this peeriodical minnit?"

A grim smile hovered about the desperado's lips.

"I reckon," was the laconic reply; "tho' I've not seen ye for years. I were a young papoose when you were first brought to the Sioux camp. So was Crazy Horse. We cut your ears off at the torture-stake."

"True," replied *Old Avalanche*, a twinge of pain visible on his wrinkled brow—"shavel 'em off clusser nor ther beerd frum a boyee's face. But, the best o' et all, Bill, ye ken't brag thet I even flinched."

"No, old man, ye stud et like a lamb, an' I'll guv ye credit fur it."

"What became of them flappers?" asked the Annihilator, huskily.

"Don't kno' what Crazy Horse done wi' his'n. I wore mine fur a charm, on a string o' beads, till it

got dried up, like a piece of pasteboard, when I throwed it away."

Tears stood in the old scout's eyes.

"Too bad," he sighed. "I war in hopes o' gettin' them poor souse back sumtime or other, an' gettin' 'em plastered on erg'in. Too bad." Then, as if he suddenly recollected himself, he began to sharpen his knife faster upon his moccasin-top."

Idaho Bill watched him somewhat nervously, growing a shade paler each moment. He could not misunderstand the meaning in this.

It meant death to him!

After a while the edge of the weapon seemed satisfactorily sharp to the touch of the Avalanche's thumb, for he said:

"Do ye kno' ther border code, Billiam?" he asked, slowly.

"I know," was the shuddering reply, "an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth."

"Yes, that's it—eye fer eye an' tooth fer tooth. But that hain't the code I shell 'dopt tew this sanguisance. This'll be an ear fer an ear, and a knife fer a throat."

The outlaw grew very white, and perspiration broke out all over his face.

"Will ye show no mercy?" he gasped.

"No! ye didn't show me none. As ye did, so'll I do."

"But hold! Is there no service I kin do ye that'll save my life? I do not want to die—I am not prepared."

The Annihilator shook his head.

"I judge not. I've sworn by all ther cherubimms o' Aurory Borey Alice to stave out on that score all ther Injun race, yersel' included. So ye mought as well say yer catty-kiss-'ems. Nuthin' short o' yer life will do me!"

Idaho Bill grew desperate.

The light that burned in his enemy's eye was stern and cold.

"I'll make a proposal," he at last managed to grin. "Take my ears and spare my life!"

Old Avalanche reflected.

"I'll make ye an offer," he said slowly, "and yer life depends upon yer decision."

"Go on."

"Wal, I'll cut off both of yer ears, and then, ef you'll show mo the old Indian path that leads thr'u' these mountains, or ever 'em ru'her, tew ther Flat Butte peak, an' tew ther Death Gulch, yo shall hav liberty an' yer decapitated eers."

Idaho Bill groaned and shuddered.

"Go on!" he gasped, white as a corpse; "I agree. Take my ears an' have it over!"

"You know the over-mountain way?"

"Ay, ay!"

"And will go thr'u' wi' yer jab wi'out attemptin' no shanannigan!"

"Yes—I swear it!"

Without further words, in less time than it takes to tell it, the poor wretch was deprived of his ears, which were chucked into the avenger's pocket.

He has said, since the transaction of that terrible deed, that he nightly dreams of ears, and could not be hired to attempt another like amputation.

As for Idaho Bill, he fainted; but while he was insensible, Old Avalanche dressed the wounds, and an hour later the two earless men were on their journey over the vast mountain wilderness.

CHAPTER XI. THE THIRD DAY.

WHERE were Josiah and Lady Maude? was the question that agitated the minds of our friends, as they made the alarming discovery that they were gone. Had the overflowing of the waters swept them away?

No, that could not be, for the bottom of the canyon had not been covered to more than a knee's depth, and no person would have been carried away by such an insignificant flood,

"P'raps ther poet keerried off ther gal," suggested old Dan, as they all stood in the Stygian gloom, undecided what to do. "I've had a premonashun as he warn't 'buve sirspeckshun."

"Yes; but whither has he gone?" cried Sir Harry, angrily. "Oh! the dastard, the traitor! How my fingers ache to get at his throat!"

"I quine he's gone back ther way he kin, pervidin' he ain't gone t'other way. My ijee ar' that he's interlinked with the canyon bandits."

"Good heaven! you don't mean to say that my darling sister is in the power of those heartless wretches?"

"Wouldn't want fer ter sw'ar tew et; but I'm thinkin' et smells strongly ther way."

"Look to the horses, quick, and see if the mule is gone, then! That will tell the story."

Dan obeyed, with alacrity, and soon returned with the intelligence that the mule and Lady Maude's horse were both missing.

"Oh! God!" groaned Lady Milburn, who had all the time been weeping violently, "I shall never see my child again."

"Yas ye will, mum," replied the guide, doffing his hat, respectfully. "Take old Ben Cogswell's word fer it Lady Maude will not be harmed, and 'll be restored tew yew afore long. I've heerd considerable of this Girl Bandit, an' believe her tew be 'bout as fair-tew-average sort o' feline as evyer didn't chaw terbarer. She won't hurt yer darter, an', afore the big flood comes, I shouldn't wonder much ef ye war hawked away out o' danger jes' like Lady Maude was!"

"Is this your candid opinion, guide?" asked Sir Harry, eagerly. "Do you really imagine it is Wild Edna's plan to save us from the flood which is impending?"

Old Dan smiled grimly.

"Not us, I sirspeck," he replied, with a chuckle—"not us, but the ladies—Lady Milburn and her daughter!"

"Be it so, then. If they only safely escape, I shall not so much hate to meet the worst."

Morning dawned over the giant peaks of the mountains, and as soon as it was light enough for his purpose the guide built a fire out of a few partly-dried limbs and cones which had been washed down from the mountains, and then easily found the tracks of the two horses in the clayey refuse, on which the poet had borne away his prize.

"Thar kin be no doubt o' the case now," he said to Sir Harry. "The bandits hev got the gal, et's purty probable."

"Yes; I have no doubts about it now. But what can we do?"

"Nuthin', as I kno' on. All we kin do ar' tew sit on our thumbs an' grin an' bear et. I'm staven sorry we ever kin inter this canyon tho', an' ef I war as rich as ye be, I'm jedgin' I'd not be tardy in gittin' out o' et."

"What would you disgrace yourself by yielding to these accursed fiends? I am truly sorry for you then. My sense of honor forbids that I should give up to them, and thereby be considered a groveling. No! I will die first—die as a brave man should die. A true Eng'lishman of noble blood does not bow down to an American outlaw."

"As ye like, boss. Ef ye ar' goin' ter die, afore gussen up a poultry sum o' spondulicks, why, I hain't no 'jeckshuns. As fer this deposit o' boomen clev, he'd not stay long in this unhealthy clime, ef he hed ernuff gold or elbow grease ter git him out."

Breakfast was dispatched, and about an hour later a body of masked horsemen were seen coming leisurely down the canyon. They were the bandits, and Wild Edna, beauteous flower of the wilderness, rode at their head, appearing, if anything, more lovely and bewitching than before, and as the cavalcade came to a halt in front of the camp, all eyes were riveted upon her.

Sir Harry rose from his seat and doffed his hat

politely, to which Wild Edna responded with a smile.

"You have come, I perceive, for the third time," said Sir Harry, "to request the toll payment."

"Exactly! This is the *last call*. You now still have a chance for life and liberty, and if you do not accept, your fate be on your own heads. Would to God I could aid you, or avert the impending doom, but I cannot. Did any of you see an apparition on the top of the Flat Butte at midnight two nights ago?"

"I did! I did!" screamed Lady Milburn, rushing forward and clasping the Girl Bandit's jeweled hand, "I saw it. Oh! girl, tell me—tell me for the love of God, was that an apparition, or was it *hum-m!*" She trembled in every limb, and her eyes burned an unnatural fire—a yearning, half-expectant glare.

"Tell me, tell me!" she continued, as Wild Edna hesitated, "for I must know!"

"I can tell you nothing, my lady," was the pitying reply. "I am bound by a solemn pledge to reveal nothing beyond the limits of our band. The specter on the Flat Butte will appear again, just before daybreak of the eleventh day from now, as you saw him, my lady. His appearance will be the signal to raise the flood-gates of the terrible Lake Tico. Fear not, however, dear lady, for you will not be allowed to perish with the rest!"

"But, my daughter—Maude, where is she?"

"Safe and sound, and enjoying a refreshing sleep when we left her. It was out of pity, that I had her spirited away. You will soon follow her!"

"Grl!" cried Sir Fleming, advancing, "are you a perfect demoness? Will you see us men, who have never raised a finger to harm you, *murdered* outright?"

Wild Edna flushed, angrily.

"I will *see* nothing of the kind. As I have told you once before, I cannot avert the flood. I have tried to persuade you to pay the toll, but you have refused. Here my work ceases. On my return to the bandit retreat, I will be cast into a strong cell, by the orders of *another*, and confined there one month for my failure in extorting the toll from you."

"Who is this other?—your gay Nevala Sam?"

"No—indeed, no. He is my brother, and as true and brave a man as any of you. Like myself, he too will be confined, and suffer on *your* account!"

She spoke so bitterly that Sir Harry's susceptible heart at once went out toward her.

"I am sorry for you," he said, walking up to her animal's side—"really, truly sorry, but I do not care to yield. Maybe when I see Lake Tico's waters bowling down upon me, I'll hasten to change my mind!" And he made an attempt to laugh gayly.

"It will be *too late*, then!" said Wild Edna, sadly; "once the flood-gates are raised, nothing possessed of life, except trees, can live in Devil's Canyon."

"Well, if this be the case, I can consider myself a doomed man."

"You refuse to pay the toll, then?"

"I do, most emphatically!"

"Alas! then you are indeed doomed!" She shot him a glance from her beautiful eyes—a glance in which was mingled pity, sorrow and—what?

The fast-beating heart of the young nobleman told him it was more than the light and glow and interest of a common nature—and his own face flushed at the thought—did this beauteous vision of the wilderness *love* him? It was a thought that filled him with expressionless joy.

The Girl Bandit, however, quickly interrupted his suddenly conceived hopes.

"Will the others pay their toll, and be allowed to go on in freedom?"

"I think not," replied Sir Fleming, who had been conferring w/ Sir Bruce; "or, at least, not at present. If we decide to pay the toll for ourselves, will it not be enough to advance to your guards, and tell them so when they can inform you?"

"I don't know," replied Wild Edna, doubtfully. "However, I can soon ascertain."

She turned to one of the masked men beside her, and said a few words in an undertone. He then turned his horse's head and galloped rapidly off up the canyon.

"I can soon answer your question, sir," said the maiden to Sir Fleming; "in the mean time do not let us hinder you, or deter you from your breakfast."

"We ate an hour ago," answered Harry, "and *your* presence is most agreeable, under the very embarrassing circumstances under which we meet."

"You are slightly addicted to flattery, I perceive," she laughed, at the same time ordering her men to retire to a proper distance, whither she also followed them.

Sir Harry did likewise. He was scarcely aware of it, but he soon found himself in the maiden's fascinating presence, and was gazing up into her face, thoughtfully, admiringly.

"You are a queen among women," he said, his eyes burning with unwonted light. "I have travelled nearly around the world, but can safely say I never beheld one of your sex more beautiful. You are too precious a flower to live and die here in this desert wild."

She drooped her eyes, and a blush stole over her purely chiseled features—a blush more of pleasure than confusion.

"You must not flatter," she said, quickly releasing the hand he had taken. "I am not used to it—I am not used to the great world you live in, or its people. I should not listen to praises from those who could never be aught to me."

Sir Harry felt his heart bound in a suspiciously excited manner, but he refrained from speaking the words of passionate love that rose to his lips.

What did all this mean? Was he actually in love with this flower of the mountain—this female brigand?

How else could he account for that deuced bobbing about of his heart? But bah! the idea of wedding such a bride—he, an aristocratic nobleman, of a noble house, and the possessor of a title. It could not be—never.

He was thus reflecting and ransacking his brain for something to say, when the masked courier returned, and spoke a few words in Spanish to Wild Edna.

"Very well," she said; then turning to Sir Harry, she continued. "It will be all right. If any of you conclude to pay the toll, between now and three o'clock of the eleventh morning, you can so notify a guard, who will be posted a few hundred yards up the gorge. He will be authorized to receive six thousand dollars from you, and furnish you with an escort to the outer world!"

"Very well, I will tell them!"

"Now, good-by, sir, and goo' luck."

"Good-by," replied Sir Harry, huskily, a tear standing in either eye—"good-by." The next moment the horses' heads were turned, and the banditti dashed away.

CHAPTER XII.

A NEW ENEMY—FIGHTING SIOUX—THE "ELEVENTH HOUR"—THE SPECTER SIGNAL.

Two days and a like number of gloomy nights passed, and still matters in Devil's Canyon remained unchanged. The camp could but await the issue of impending events.

Escape was impossible, for old Dan had ascertained that the savages had taken possession of the eastern termination of the canyon, although they seemed in no hurry to advance.

"I think," said Sir Harry to Sir Fleming, on the third morning, as all sat around the camp-fire—"I think that between us we had better pay the toll, at least for mother, and restore her, along with Lady Maude, to freedom. It will not be right to let her suffer death just because we are obstinate and refuse to pay the toll."

Sir Fleming sneered.

"I quite disagree with you," he replied, sarcastically. "I am of the opinion that *self-preservation* is first to be considered, before looking to the welfare of others. Lady Hetty will probably be released by the banditti; but, even if she is not, I cannot see that her life is so preciously valuable to me."

"To you—no!" cried Sir Harry, sternly. "Were she dead, you accursed plotter, *her* rich estate of Ferndale, you, as a husband, could claim. Were I and Lady Maude dead, all of the old family possessions of the great name of Arriscourt would be yours. Think not, Sir Fleming Milburn, that I am blind to your schemes and machinations. I can read you like a book."

"Years ago, my father, Sir Henry, came to America to explore this wilderness. By some means unknown to us, you, an outlawed relation, joined him in his expedition, and traveled with him until his death—from the top of yonder peak."

"No sooner was he dead than you returned to England with the sad intelligence, bearing papers purporting to have been given you by Sir Henry, previous to his death, which bade my poor mother marry you, in case my father should die during any of his dangerous adventures. You had been a suitor for Lady Hetty's hand, previous to her union with my father, and, under the circumstances, she felt it her duty to obey the mandate of one whom death had overtaken in a remote land."

"So, after making you promise to bring her here to this wild country, that she might at least recover the bones of Sir Henry, she wedded you—wedded a very demon. This was many years ago, when Maude and I were both children. Since then you have been a very cruel master to us, and it is only since I attained my majority, that you could be induced to visit this place, according to your promise."

"This is *not* the Flat Butte in question!" growled Sir Fleming, wincing perceptibly under the young man's accusing gaze.

"You *lie!*" cried Sir Harry, hotly. "This is the place where my father ended his days; or—more properly, perhaps—where his life *was end'd!*"

The tone as well as the words of the speaker caused Sir Fleming to grow a trifle pale, and exchanged a glance with Sir Bruce.

"We will not continue this conversation at present," he said, flushing with rage, as he rose and sauntered away. "You will tempt me to kill you, some of these times, by pursuing this insulting behavior!"

"I fear you not!" retorted Sir Harry. "You have already made half a score of attempts upon my life, without success and I believe I shall live to see the justice you deserve meted out to you."

The morning dragged away, and a hot noon-day sun at last shone straight down into Devil's Canyon.

It was about this time that old Dan Coggswell came striding hurriedly into camp. He had gone down the canyon a few hours previous, in quest of game, and had promised to be back by sunset. Consequently, his early return warned Sir Harry that something of importance had occurred.

"What is it?" he asked, anxiously. "Why are you back so soon?"

"I jedge thar's need on't," replied the guide, with a dubious shake of his head. "Ef we don't catch Jessie o' ther shirt afore this time, ter-morrer I'm er hod-carrier."

"Indeed! What is wrong?"

"Injuns—copperous-cullor'd Soos. Thar's more'n a thousan' cummin' up this dereliction, to pay us their respecks!"

"Good Heaven! Is this true? Then we must prepare to fight them!"

"I rather guess so, ef we've ther least inclinashun ter keepin' our kerpillary persesshuns. Go wake up ther uther sellers, an' git yer pop-guns in reddy ness fer use. I'm goin' ter thro' up er obstickel tew their pa'gress."

Sir Harry immediately hurried off, while the guide proceeded to perform his part of the work.

Among the effects in the outfit were a pick and shovel, articles which every wise western traveler is not without.

Taking these he proceeded a short distance down the canyon, to a spot where the bottom was formed of soft sandy soil. Here he paused, and began to throw up a barricade of dirt from wall to wall, occasionally dislodging large flakes of rock from above and adding this to the pile.

For hours the guide labored steadily, and at last, he paused and surveyed his completed work. The barricade, constructed mainly of dirt, was breast-high across the canyon, the top being covered with heavy rocks that Dan had detached from the mighty walls, while an abatis of sharpened limbs protruded beyond as a defense against scaling the parapet. Altogether, it was an admirable piece of work, and in case of attack, would, while it concealed the defenders, prevent a rush from the enemy.

The barricade done, Dan proceeded to call Sir Harry. As soon as the baronet beheld the result of the afternoon's labor, he uttered an exclamation of surprise.

"Just the thing!" he exclaimed, as he carefully examined the defense. "With our repeating rifles and revolvers, I am confident we can hold our own for awhile, at least."

"Yes," replied Dan, grimly. "I speculate we kin guv 'em a purty big rub, ef ther Lord's willin'. Now, then, ye git back tew camp, an' snatch w'at grub an' morph us ye kin, an' I'll stand guard. Ef ye hear me screech 'Soos,' ye jist kin a-hoopin' down hayr, fer thar'll be need o' ye. Bring yer fellers, too!"

There was no call from Coggswell until about midnight, when he skulked into camp and aroused the sleepers with the news that the reds were coming. Leaving Lady Milburn alone, the four men crept down to the barricade, rifles in hand, and posted themselves on the defensive.

"I do not see any savages!" said Sir Harry, peering over into the canyon beyond, "and I doubt if—*thunder!*"

An arrow grazed the young nobleman's cheek, as he was speaking.

"Ye'll feel 'em, ef ye don't see 'em!" said old Dan with a grim chuckle, "perwid'en ye make yer pate a targit fer their arrers. But look!—ready and fire!"

A motley gang of savages could now be distinguished, through the pall of inky darkness, as they came skurrying silently toward the barricade.

"Fire—once, two, an' three times!" hissed the guide, and four rifles cracked, sending sharp echoes up the mountain-side, while deadly missiles went hurtling into the Sioux ranks, causing shrieks of pain and death.

Again and again the terrible repeating rifles belched forth streams of lurid flame, and, taken wholly by surprise the savages turned and fled.

"Quick! Now's yer time ter reload!" cried old Dan, and the discharged cartridges were quickly replaced with fresh ones.

But no red-skins put in an appearance again that night, although all of the defenders watched till the sunlight kissed the peak of Flat Butte.

Sir Harry volunteered to stand guard while the others went inside camp and prepared breakfast. So Dan, accompanied by Sir Fleming and Sir Bruce, set out, leaving the young nobleman alone. Arriving at camp, it was discovered that Lady Milburn and one of the horses were missing. No fears were entertained by the guide, however for he rightly guessed that the banditti had come to remove her to a place of safety.

That day passed, but no further demonstration was made by the red-skins; in fact, not a glimpse of them had been gained.

As soon as night fell over the mountain, Sir Bruce was posted on sentinel duty, to be relieved by Sir Fleming at midnight,

Another—the fifth—morning dawned, and still no sign of the Sioux.

"It's cur'us," said Coggswell, as he and Sir Harry stood at the barricade—"da'n'd cur'us. I never knew'd Soos ter act up in this shape afore, sure as I'm a masticater o' tenderl'ins. Ef thar ain't sum uncommon devilment ahind all o' this holdin' off, et's beyant my cumpass o' reckonin'."

"It does seem strange. From what little I have heard and seen, these red rascals are not generally so tardy in attacking a foe," replied Sir Harry.

"Right. But I jedge I've snatched their ijee this time. Knowin' we're sum on shootin', an' not keerin' tew lose enny more braves than possybul, they're goin' ter clim' us."

"What do you mean?"

"Why, ye see sum o' 'em has gone over the mountings, an' 'll sooner or later git down inter ther canyon between us an' ther banditti, arter w'ich both divisions 'll give us a nudge frum each eend, at ther same time."

"You believe that is their plan?"

"I don' make much doubt o' et. Ye see, Soos kin climb like all natur', an' et'll be no sarcumstance fer 'em tew scoot these mountings, ef ye'll give 'em time."

That night the savages in the canyon made a rush down on the barricade in large numbers, but Dan was quite ready for them, and the incessant and deadly fire from the four repeating rifles made such fearful havoc, that the red-skins again retreated, much decreased in numbers, and howling with rage.

The succeeding day passed, and the next, and the next, and still the next, without further developments.

At last the night of the tenth day fell over the mountains, but it disclosed only two figures in the Devil's Canyon at the camp. Sir Fleming and Sir Bruce had long since ridden off up the gorge to pay their toll, and be saved from the flood.

Sir Harry and old Dan Coggswell were left to themselves, and their doom!

"No; I will not yield in this, the eleventh hour!" the young bronx had said, with wonderful firmness, when questioned by the others, previous to their departure. "Dan can go if he wishes, and I will furnish him with the requisite toll money."

"No!" cried the old guide, "not much, Mary Ann, ef I kno' myself. I ain't ther coon as will desert a feller in a fix."

So the two had remained, and it was with wildly-beating hearts that they watched the night wear away, toward another day-dawn.

At last Sir Harry exclaimed, as he pointed toward the summit of the Flat Butte, where that terrible specter had suddenly appeared—the same awful sight which Lady Milburn had seen:

"Look out for it, now, Dan, and say your prayers, for that signal has opened the flood-gates of Lake Tico. Good-by, old boy!"

CHAPTER XIII.

JUST A MOMENT TOO LATE—WILD EDNA'S RIDE.

FAR up among the mighty, hoary crags beyond Flat Butte, nestling in a deep and gloomy basin, lay the cold green waters of Lake Tico—or Lake Airy, as it has since been christened. A silent, uninviting sheet of water, suspended, as it were, midway between heaven and earth, and formed in a natural square, each corner being a towering peak, and the sides or shores forming a brink to an awful abyss that yawned on every side.

One side of this remarkable mountain-lake overlooked Devil's Canyon, and the other that awful abyss into which Sir Henry had been hurled, years before. The lake shore was accessible from three points, but the hand of man, not of nature, had made it so. On the northeastern side, a long bridge of Indian network stretched across a yawning precipi-

pice, and made connection with a lower peak, which in itself connected with other gigantic neighbors that formed the chain stretching away off to the great green savannas to the east.

Directly east from the lake shore was a similar bridge, and this connected with the towering Flat Butte at its summit. The third mode of reaching the shore was by means of a spiral stairway which, commencing at the southern corner, wound its way gradually up the mighty mountain, until, when reaching a level with the lake, it had made a complete circle around the gray deposit of rock. This, too, had been the handiwork of man, as was readily evidenced by the unmistakable ax-marks and blasting holes. The banks of the lake were very narrow—so narrow that only a steady-nerved person would dare attempt to walk on them for fear of falling off into the lake on the one side or over the precipice on the other. In some places the water drooled and dripped over the edge, thereby making the rocks slippery.

At the side overlooking Devil's Canyon were the "flood-gates" mentioned. They had been constructed by the banditti, and when lifted from their rocky fastenings, the waters of the lake could easily pour out in a mammoth volume into the gorge below. These gates were raised out of a groove in the rock by a great wooden lever, which could only be moved by a score of men, and were so deeply sunken that the whole of Lake Tico's waters could be plunged into the canyon in ten seconds' time.

The retreat of the banditti was in such a position that the flood could not reach it, although dashing directly by.

Half a mile above the base of the Flat Butte, where the camp of our party had been, was a break in the mighty wall of the canyon. At this just two arms of a river always stood. The break in question was a round black hole in the wall, somewhat resembling a sewer outlet, only not so small. A horse could easily pass through this aperture with a person sitting erect on its back. This natural tunnel ran in a semi-curving and zig-zag shape for perhaps a quarter of a mile, descending a trifling grade, when it made an abrupt turn in the bowels of the mountains, and proceeded due east, where, before its course lay in a north by easterly direction. At the place where occurred the break in the walls of the canyon, the little stream which ran down its entire length had its source, the flood-gates of Lake Tico being directly overhead, and emitting a constant wastage of water, through crevices in the rock.

By following the tunnel beyond the turn, for another quarter of a mile, you debouched from Stygian darkness into semi-light. You were at the bottom of Death's Gulch, and on a level with the Great Lakes.*

You are at the bottom of Death Gulch. And such a bottom!

It is a natural garden of paradise—an oasis in a vast mountain desert. Two acres area, in all, fenced in by those majestic rocky monsters, the mountains: green with velvety grass and redolent with perfume from a hundred flowering trees and plants, it is a most astonishing and wondrous sight.

Water from a cascade a thousand feet above is transformed into a mist that trickles down the rugged wall, until it gathers into a little rivulet in the rocky yet grassy bottom.

In the center of the gulch is a large, barn-like edifice, thatched with fir-branches and sod, and built of rock. Around this, numerous beds of wild-flowers are in a state of careful cultivation; here and there are scattered rude settees on which men are reclining, indolently, and smoking.

Although the hour is past midnight, they are thus,

* The remarkable tunnel under the mountains is an existing freak of nature, personally explored by the author.

engaged, for there is work for them to do, presently, and they would be awake.

The gulch is lit dimly with flaring torches, thrust in neighboring crevices.

Soon a door of the edifice is opened, and four armed men issue forth, followed by a tall, ghastly figure, clad in a trailing robe of snowy white. His hair sweeps his waist, as does an immense beard of silvery hue, and in his eyes burns the unnatural fire of insanity—a fire that might cause any brave man to tremble.

As he steps from the door a figure attempted to follow, but he hurled her back with an enraged shriek.

"Avaunt! accursed fool! Dost think to evade my vigilance? Back with you, or by the Royal Scepter, I'll cast thee into the dungeon, from whence thy pleadings for liberty caused me to fetch you."

He seemed convulsed with an overpowering passion, while he spoke, and glowered down upon the shrinking figure in the doorway, savagely.

"Oh! my father!" cried the Girl Bandit, wildly, piteously, "do not open the terrible flood-gates to-night. Postpone the awful crime until to-morrow, or next day, that those two deserted men may have a chance more for life!"

"Hal hal hal hal!" yelled the other, shrieking and gesticulating with mad laughter. "Hal ha! You would have me spare my sacrificial offerings to the Royal Mountain God and his Divine Powers. Ha! ha! thou art a fool, Zerama—a blind, idiotic fool. Back to thy virgin couch, before I curse thee!"

He raised his baton as if to strike, but with a frightened cry she darted back into the cabin.

Summoning all of those men who were lounging on the settees, by a wave of his hand, the man cried in tones of anger:

"Awake, you drowsy fools, awake! Dost not remember that this is the hour of sacrifice—the glorious hour when the waters of Tico shall sweep a path of destruction through the canyon of the Devil? Awake, I say!"

The men sprung to their feet obedient to his call, and rifle in hand, formed in line.

"Yes, your greatness," said one, who was evidently a lieutenant, "we are quite ready."

"Good! That is well. Now, away to the flood-gates, and prepare to answer my signal from the peak top!"

The men bowed low, then turned on their heel, and fled away to the tunnel. As soon as they had gone, the strange commander turned to the four armed men who had remained behind.

"Now, Valquero, is my balloon ready?"

"Yes, your greatness," was the reply, "all ready. This way, sir."

They led the way to the wall in the rear of the cabin, where, upon the ground, was a small wicker-basket to which was attached a rope. This ran like a diminutive serpent up through the darkness, through a pulley on the top of the Flat Butte, and back down to the bottom of Death Gulch, again.

Stepping into the basket the commander gave the signal, and the men sprang to and pulled down on the return rope, thereby drawing the basket up out of sight in the darkness. For some time they pulled away manfully, and were at last rewarded by feeling the rope tighten and cease to draw further.

The basket had reached the top.

In the mean time the other banditti had passed through the tunnel, and by way of the rocky staircase reached the shore of the lake, and grasped the fatal lever that was to be the means of carrying death and destruction down through Devil's Canyon. There were full three-score of them, and it would be no feat of strength for them to hoist the gates. All that was now wanting was the signal from the Flat Butte, whither all eyes were turned in attention.

Full ten minutes passed when a faint flash reddened the sky, then followed a pistol report, and a

fire whose color was blood-red flared fiercely on high from the top of the peak.

In the bright light stood that tall, spectral, white-enveloped figure, whose beard swept the gleaming girdle at his waist, and in whose hand waved to and fro the terrible baton.

First, he approached the portion of the plateau overlooking the canyon, and glaring down into its depths, gave vent to a series of wild, horrible shrieks; then, he wheeled abruptly and advanced to the edge, overlooking the Death Gulch, and Lake Tico, far beyond. Halting on the brink of the frightful precipice, he raised both arms aloft. In accordance with plans understood among them, one of the bandits then sprinkled a sack of some strange smelling powder on the shore near to the great lever, and applied a match to it. Instantly a flame similar to the one on the Flat Butte sprung up and illuminated the scene.

Every surrounding object was plainly revealed.

All eyes were turned upon the spectral figure—for the fatal signal. Once he raised the baton on high, swung it around his head and let it fall back by his side.

Once!

Then after a lapse of several moments of dead silence, he repeated the movement.

Twice!

Only once more and then the fatal gates would be raised. Eagerly and impatiently the banditti watched.

Finally the long bony arm with the baton began to rise the third time.

But hark! There is the faintly audible report of a rifle, heard from the distant peak with which the northeastern bridge of rope communicates; the rising arm of the spectral chief falls to his side; he staggers back, and with a wild, horrible yell, sinks upon the plateau.

"Stop! stop!" shrieks a voice, as a wiry figure comes bounding across the rope-bridge—"stop! in ther cognomen o' ther Jehoover. Hayr I kim, ther grate O'Rory Borey Alice o' ther north—ther howlin' hailstarm o' devastation, ther orful sky-rocket o' demolishun."

But the banditti paid no heed. With a wild, vengeful scream they sprung the mighty lever, and the great waters massed in Lake Tico went roaring and pouring into the Devil's Canyon.

At this identical juncture Wild Edna and the four guards stood in the mouth of the tunnel where it opened into the canyon. As the water came dashing downward in a grand, awful volume, she turned to them and said:

"I am ready, Josh!" and she sprung into a flat boat lying near.

"Quick, now! cast me out before the torrent grows too fierce. 'Tis a fearful venture, I'll admit, but I must save those men. If I never come back, friends, God pro per you!"

As of one accord, they kissed her hand in silent devotion, then gathering the frail craft in their arms, they plumped it forcibly through the sheet of falling waters, and into the mad rapids beyond.

The boat neither swamped nor capsized, but dashed down over the fury-lashed flood with startling velocity. The depth of the seething waters could be safely estimated at twenty feet.

On—on—on—dashed the little tempest-tossed craft with wild-eyed Edna at the steering-oar!

At last, she knew by surrounding landmarks that she was directly over the place where Sir Harry's camp had been. In vain, here, did she peer around, with hope struggling against hope in her breast that by some strange chance she would see the young nobleman and his guide still clinging to a projecting crevice or spur.

Alas! she was doomed to disappointment. Nothing but the forbidding gray walls met her gaze—nothing but the awful roaring tumult of the furious flood greeted her hearing.

Sir Harry and Dan had been swept away!

CHAPTER XIV.
RETURN TO DEATH GULCH.

SWEPT away!

A sudden wave of sadness stole over the beauteous face of the Girl Bandit as she realized this, and tears filled her eyes—tears of bitter anguish, for she loved Sir Harry, this wild flower of the mountain—loved him with all the intense power of her maiden nature—had loved him from the moment of her first meeting with him.

He seemed so upright and royally grand to her, and she could not help it that her loyal little heart had gone out to him in its great wealth of affection. And could she doubt that he too held her in high esteem? No!

He had said she was the nearest to womanly perfection, or to that effect, and he had looked so earnestly, so yearningly and pleadingly into her face, with his wondrous eyes, that her untutored heart had leaped and throbbed in her bosom for very joy.

Now he was gone!

Gone in the devastating and merciless flood, and if she ever saw his face again it would be when the features so well loved were pale in death.

Oh! how bitter was the pain that now pierced her heart; how silent and torturing the anguish that convulsed her whole being! Her hands clutched tightly to the steering-sweep, but she made no effort to guide the craft, as it plunged along with the mad waters.

It kept near the center of the swift current, and escaped being wrecked on the foam-lashed wall of the canyon.

Why care if it did go to pieces? All of the sunshine of her young life had gone out; she was indifferent to all dangers; she wanted to die.

Why not end her days here in these green, seething waters, that roared and boomed along like continuous thunder? Why not thus end her distasteful and aimless life, and join him, in that great and better land, where all was perpetual sunshine and eternal love?

Ah! life had been a sad experience in the dark past. For years she had lived among a lawless gang of men, who, though bandits they were, had never by touch or word done a wrong to their fair, sweet-tempered mistress, for they loved her as a ministering angel; and not to see Wild Edna hovering about with words of gentle reproof at any bad action, or words of cheer to the downhearted, was like depriving a flower of its morning dew.

True she had had a mother, once—a wild, gipsy-like mother, who had died years ago, and since then the life of Wild Edna had been but a mockery, as it were.

She had none of her own sex to love and commune with—no one to love, in fact, save it were her followers or that demented old man of the Flat Butte, with whom she had been left at her mother's death, by whom she had since been ruled.

To be sure, he was kind, when not in one of his insane spells, and loving, too; but it was a rare hour that ever saw him wholly free from these ravings.

The banditti were also kind and courteous, and her brother, Nevada Sam, was as kind and loving as a brother could be. But, for all this, there had been a blank in her life—a vacant spot in her pure virgin heart, that had only been the more vividly disclosed to her after she had met Sir Harry.

Never had she permitted a hope to take root in her heart—a hope that she could ever be aught or anything to him; but it had stolen there despite her caution, and she was secretly longing and yearning, building air-castles and hoping for his company, his love.

Now all was gone—hope, expectation, all.

She imagined she could see his lifeless corpse being borne ruthlessly along on the crest of the angry waves.

She too, though scarcely conscious of the fact,

was being borne along swiftly, her little craft seeming to have adopted the sole responsibility of keeping in the middle of the stream.

On—on, over the thundering flood, and then she was startled by a loud, ringing hallo.

"H-a-y, thar, ship, ahoy! Whar ye goin', an'd'y'e ship passenjars?"

The voice was that of Dan Coggswell. In an instant all her hopes revived.

With almost frenzied energy she directed the headlong craft into a near eddy, where, with skillful hand, she managed to hold it.

"Where are you?" she cried.

"Hayr! hayr! on the starboard side o' ye, in a big black-b'ar hoel up in ther sides o' ther rocks. Hurry up afore yer skoonyer gits too far down-stream!"

With a strength that surprised her, Wild Edna gave a few powerful strokes at the paddle that sent the boat spinning across toward the aperture, whose mouth she could now just define, ahead in the curve.

Nearer and nearer she approached, and at last, as the boat went crashing against the rocky wall, she made a leap and Old Dan Coggswell caught her in his arms and pulled her into the bear's cave! It was the same one from which the guide and Sir Harry had tumbled the big Bruin, a few days previous.

"Thar ye ar', daisy," he said, depositing the brave girl on her feet, "safe an' sound's a shell-bark."

"But, the other!" gasped Will Edna, shivering with apprehension—"Will he . . . ?"

"Ye mean ther boss, Sir Harry? Yas, I see'd you leant that way. Wal, miss, I'm darnashun sorry, but I'm afeard Sir Harry has gone under, fer good. Ye kin see fer yers'l', however, as he lays over ther in ther corner, limp an' loose as an unsturched shirt."

The Girl Bandit did not wait for him to finish the sentence, but hastily groped her way to where the body of Sir Harry lay insensible, with a ragged gash over his temple.

Wild Edna took his head in her lap, and with skillful hand dressed the wound, old Dan assisting as well as he knew how.

"I think 'tain't no kinder use tew," he said, shaking his grizzled head as the moments fled by and still the baronet lay like one in death.

"On the contrary, I think he *wil* recover," was the reply. "This is an ugly bruise, but I believe it has only stunned him. Bring me a little water in your hat, and I will pour it down the back of his neck. That will bring him to when nothing else will."

Dan hastened to obey, and scooped his hat full of water out of a trickling little spring inside their retreat. Then leaving the girl to her act of restoration, he returned to the mouth of the cave to watch the flood.

The waters had now gone down, and it was plain that Lake Tico was nearly drained.

"Did Sir Fleming and Sir Bruce come up and pay their ransom?" asked Dan, turning abruptly from the mad waters below him.

"Yes," was the reply, "but not with very good grace. They, with the two ladies, are now lodged in the bandits' cabin in Death Gulch. Day after tomorrow, they will be conducted on through the canyon, to an Indian fort beyond the mountains, where they can easily catch an overland train."

"An' w'at o' us; hev we got ter stay behind?"

"I cannot answer you that question yet, sir. I have made up my mind to leave these mountains—my brother and I—and if I cannot arrange it so you can go with your party, I will take you both along, when I go. I have a few trusted followers among the banditti, who are as eager as I to quit this wild, lawless life."

Sir Harry now began to show signs of returning consciousness, and soon, to the joy of both, he gave a gasp and opened his eyes.

"Ugh!" he groaned, staring around, until his eyes lit upon the sweetly beautiful face of Will

Edna, when a smile of welcome flitted across his own pallid features.

"Where am I? I have been wounded—had a fight for life—Dan and I. How came I here, and you, too?"

A few words explained all.

"But you, fair Edna—why did you peril so much to try to save us?"

A red flush mantled her face—her eyes filled with tears but her lips refused to speak.

"Ah, sweet girl," he murmured, drawing her head down to his own, "if my poor life is worth so much to you, let me here pay the recompense of so much love, by giving myself to you."

She attempted to rise and leave; he pulled her back, and caught her in a loving, passionate embrace, while he rained kisses on her rosy lips and crimsoning cheek.

"Edna—darling," he murmured, "do not be frightened nor tremble thus. I love you, sweetest—love you as man never loved before. You are not indifferent to me; I know it:—and therefore in all earnestness, and in the honesty of a true love I ask you, darling—will you love me, if it be only a tenth part as much as I love you, and change the name of Wild Edna to that Lady Edna?"

"But—but—" she faltered, though she did not shrink from his manly embrace, "you know nothing, absolutely nothing, of me or my antecedents."

"Nor do I care, darling. I wed you and love you for yourself, not for your antecedents. True, I know nothing of them, but I am positive that you are as pure as you are beautiful—a fit mate for any man, no matter what his name or lineage."

"My parentage is respectable. My father was a Spanish-Mexican ranchero, who, ere his death, rose to be a distinguished man in Texan history. My mother was an Englishwoman, and after my father's death, when I and my brother were but children, she came North, intending to settle in Minnesota, where her brother resided.

"But Indians drove her train into this vicinity, from whom they were rescued by our band of mountain outlaws, headed by the old man you saw on the Flat Butte.

"We were all held captives for years, and, in fact, ever since our capture. The second year of our duration, mother married the wild chief, but died a month after her bridal."

"That is enough," cried Sir Harry, kissing her rapturously. "I am amply satisfied, my love, my Queen. No son of our noble old house will have ever won a brighter, more priceless gem than lucky I. Say yes, Edna darling; oh! say yes, that I may be doubly assured that you love me, and are mine!"

She did not answer, but nestled contentedly in his arms, and their lips met in a long, passionate kiss, that told better than could have words, the truth.

In the mean time, the flood had gone down, and Devil's Canyon was free from the destroying element.

When he could at last see the bottom, old Dan apprised the lovers of the fact, and Wild Edna sprung to her feet.

"I must go, now," she said, as Sir Harry would have detained her, "and see how things have shaped in the retreat. Do not fear for me, for I shall risk nothing."

"Very well; I will try to endure your absence, though it seems hard to part so soon. Are we to remain in here?"

"Yes, until I return, and that will be just as soon as I can."

By aid of a lasso, the maiden was soon lowered from the bear's cave, and soon disappeared up the canyon.

The day passed slowly to the two men.

Night at last fell over the land, and both Dan and Sir Harry sought rest in repose, for they had not slept a wink the previous night.

Early in the following morning, they heard a call

from below, in the canyon, and rushing to the entrance, beheld Wild Edna there.

"Come!" she said, excitedly, "hurry and slide down the rope, and follow me to the Death Gulch. Something has happened that demands your immediate presence there."

They obeyed, by quickly scrambling down the lasso, after which Wild Edna led the way up the canyon, to the mouth of the tunnel. Here a squad of four masked men took them in charge, and conducted them through and into the cabin in Death Gulch.

CHAPTER XV.

LAST SCENE BEFORE THE CURTAIN FALLS.

HERE, a strange tableau was presented. The room was some thirty feet long by twenty wide, and was the main compartment of the cabin. It was furnished in the primitive style of the Far West, and with appointments of the rudest description.

On the floor in one corner was a couch of skins, on which lay a figure apparently in great mental or physical pain: for his groans were loud and horrible to hear. By his bedside knelt Lady Milburn and her daughter, sobbing in the depths of their handkerchiefs, while at their side stood the tall commanding figure of Nevada Sam.

In another corner of the room lay two more figures, bound hand and feet, whom the reader will have no difficulty in recognizing as the redoubtable Old Avalanche, and Idaho Bill. It was old Avalanche who had fired the unerring bullet which dropped the spectral figure on the Flat Butte, the night of the flood.

After days of tortuous climbing through a wild, awful mountain wilderness, he had arrived too late to avert the flood.

At the opposite side of the room, all the bandits were formed in a compact line, and directly before them stood two prisoners—Sir Fleming and Sir Bruce.

On the further side of the bed from Nevada Sam, stood a rough old borderer, whose vocation it was to deal out medicine and pills to any who might require his services.

It was the situation of affairs as Wild Edna entered the room, accompanied by Sir Harry, Dan, and the guards. The latter remained near the door, with the guide, and Edna led her betrothed forward to the couch.

"Sir Harry," said Nevada Sam, touching his sombrero respectfully, "you have arrived too late to hear the dying story of the man lying before you, but I am so well acquainted with him, and with his past life, that, if you will listen, I will tell you all."

Sir Harry inclined his head, as he studied the features of the bandit-chief, and Nevada Sam went on:

"Twenty years ago Sir Henry Arriscourt, a great explorer, came to America to travel in this western wilderness, and bring to light the features of unknown parts of the New World.

"He was the sole surviving son of an old house, and a man of great knowledge and culture. In leaving England, his native land, he also left behind him a wife and two infant children, who were the pride of his possessions.

"Years before, Lady Hetty had had another suitor, in the person of one of Sir Henry's relatives, Sir Fleming Milburn by name, but in consequence of some disgrace he had been forced to quit England and relinquish the field to Sir Henry, who soon after wedded the lady of his choice.

"No sooner did Sir Henry reach American soil, than, seenly disguised, his rival offered him his services for a small consideration, and an engagement was effected, after which the two traveled westward.

"It was Sir Henry's highest ambition to do the loftiest peak in this section, etc. he proceeded further, and for that purpose he secured a Canadian

guide, but he proving incapable, another fellow was added to the staff."

"Thet war me!" shouted Old Avalanche, from his corner—"me, ther great snow-slide o' destruction; ther boreal breeze o' demolishen, an' ther whirly-gig o' annihilation! Thet war me, by all ther ele-fants!"

"Darn my socks!" ejaculated a voice, and a man leaped from among the banditti; "see yere, ole hoss, kinder 'pears ter me I've heerd ther squeek o' yer vocality afore, ain't I? I one-t hed a bruther wi' ther precise same wabble in his v'ice, but ther Sooks got him, wile I war, as Shakespear sed,

"Grafted inter ther army.

"Now, I say, my Christyen fr'end, hain't yer name Hogg—spelt wi' tew G's? 'Peers ter me ye like a powerful measure like the old family o' Hoggs, w'ot uster live over in Slinktown, afore ther inhooman red-skins burnt et?"

"Yas, my appellaterys ar' Hogg," replied Old Avalanche, excitedly—"Alva Lanch Hogg, sure's beavers hev twins."

"Then allow me ter interdooce myself as yer bruther, Josiah Billiam Hogg—Hogg spelt wi' two G's—the grate Poet o' thor Nor'west, an' ther famuse romancer o' thor Powder River Range."

There was a glad cry of delight; the Annihilator's bonds were cut, and the next instant the two long-lost brothers were locked in a bear-like hug.

All this time Nevada Sam was speaking.

"After the second guide was added, the expedition plunged deep into the wilderness, and after many days' toilsome climbing, reached the top of the Flat Butte, above us, only to find that other explorers had been there.

"While camping on the Butte, Sir Fleming and his secret accomplice, Raleigh, the Canadian guide, formed a hellish plan, and executed it.

"The elder guide was sent down the mountain-side for cones, and during his absence Sir Henry was lowered over the precipice and dropped down into this, the Death Gulch."

Sir Harry uttered a horrified cry.

"The fall did not kill your father," resumed Nevada, "for the rope by which they lowered him reached within ten feet of the bottom, but in dropping his head struck a rocky spur and fractured the skull, thereby causing insanity, from which he has never recovered. In Death Gulch he found a band of outlaws, and ever since that night, twenty years ago, he has been their chief. Sir Fleming Milburn returned to England, I have learned from your mother, and—well, you know the rest."

"Now, one more matter and I have done. On the night of the flood, this dying man received his death-wound at the hand of yon scout, Old Avalanche—the man who is the only one now living an' capable of speech who can bear witness that Sir Fleming Milburn is guilty of an attempt on your father's life. The question is: is punishment to be inflicted on the scout? He says he fired the fatal shot to prevent the signal from being given that was intended to cause the raising of the flood-gates of Lake Tico."

Sir Harry was about to reply, when, by a mighty effort, the dying man sat up on his couch of skins.

"Set Alva Lanch free!" he said, in a husky whisper. "He is not guilty of intentional murder, and I thank him for relieving me from a life of pain, mental torture and misery. I freely forgive him, as I hope God will forgive me. Sam—where is he?"

Nevada Sam advanced to the side of the couch, with bowed head and tearful eyes.

"Good," said Sir Henry. "My boy, you have been as good as a son to me, and I would see you happy. To place you on equal terms with your fellow-men, I will you the result of my years of outlawry—one hundred thousand dollars, which you will find beneath this couch, and, moreover, I give my consent to your union with Maude, here; for

my eyes have apprised me that you two are not indifferent to each other.

"Harry, my son, in you I see a noble man of whom I am justly proud. You are the last male representative of my own noble house. It therefore devolves upon you to support my dear wife and your mother, in her declining path through life, and also to marry, that the family name may be handed down to future generations. I have selected for you a beautiful bride whose past life has been one of purity and goodness, and whose pedigree is of the best in our American land."

"You mean Wild Edna?"

"I do, my son, I do."

"Then rest easy on that point. She and I have learned the lesson of love, and she is to be mine."

"Thank God. I am now satisfied and would be content to die were it not for parting from thee, my dearly loved wife."

"Weep not for me, husband," sobbed Lady Hetty, "for perhaps God will soon summon me to join you in that great and better world!"

He kissed her, then sunk back on the couch, a smile of glory overspreading his bearded face and ere long he ceased to breathe.

A few hours later Sir Bruce and Sir Fleming were conducted to the mouth of the tunnel by a squad of the banditti, and placed upon strong, swift-limbed mustangs.

Nevada Sam told them that half an hour's start would be given them down the canyon, and then the flood-gates of Lake Tico would be opened.

Accordingly, the two fugitives plunged their spurs into their steeds' flesh, and dashed furiously away down the canyon.

When the half-hour was up, the flood-gates were raised, and Tico's waters again flew down the Devil's Canyon on its mission of death and destruction!

CHAPTER XVI. CONCLUSION.

The body of Sir Henry was boxed and prepared for transportation, but at the last moment, it was decided to bury him in the gulch, rather than to attempt the difficulty of bearing him back to England.

Accordingly Nevada read an Episcopal funeral service over his coffin, and the lifeless clay of the once great explorer, was consigned to a rocky grave in the Death Gulch.

After this last sad rite was over, a consultation was held with the brigands, which resulted in a resolve on their part to quit the scene of their late operations, and to enter the Black Hills country.

For a small compensation they agreed to conduct our friends out through the canyon, to the Indian fort, where they could join a train *via* the Upper Gap to Fort Dakota.

The start was made on the following morning, and all except Old Avalanche and Josiah Hogg left the Devil's Canyon, for the time being—unquestionably forever.

The latter shouldered their rifles and took an opposite course, down the canyon, where soon to the Annihilator's surprise, he was joined by Florence Nightingale, who had been faithfully searching for his master since having lost him, during the perilous trip over the mountains.

Idaho Bill went with the banditti, having decided to join them.

The party whose adventures we have been picturing, reached Dakota fort, in due season, and remained there until September, 1876, when they started for England. During the sojourn at the fort, Nevada and Sir Harry, armed with proof-papers, found on Sir Henry's person, took a trip down across the country into Mexico, where they succeeded in finding a valuable property, which was duly disposed of, and the proceeds divided between the brother and sister.

Lady Milburn died on the voyage to England, and was happy in the knowledge that she was going to her husband, in heaven.

Old Avalanche and Josiah Hogg still make the far Nor'west their home, and it is the sole ambition of the former to get even with the Sioux demon, Crazy Horse, who, I am sorry to say, yet lives.

Nevada and his vivacious wife have returned to American soil, to reside, and Sir Harry and Lady Edna are at present doing the West in search of a beautiful spot to build themselves a home on.

Dan Coggs-well, guide, was shot and killed, in a late skirmish with the Sioux, and his remains were interred in the prairie, a mile out from Cheyenne.

THE END.

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